

JEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

MAN AND RELIGION

MAN AND RELIGION : a DIALOGUE WITH PANIKKAR

Raimundo Panikkar - Abraham Koothottil

THE RELATIVELY ABSOLUTE AND THE
ABSOLUTELY RELATIVE IN THE REALM OF RELIGIONS

M. Singleton

SEMANTICS AND THEOLOGY : a STATUS QUESTIONIS

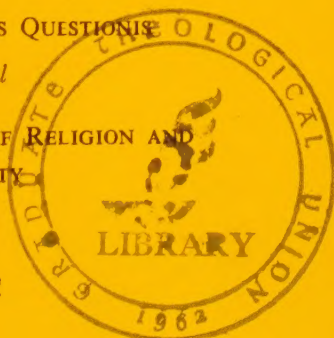
Joseph Mathew Angadiyil

SIGN OF CONTRADICTION - a CRITIQUE OF RELIGION AND
ITS RELATION TO SOCIETY

Thomas Vellilamthadam

TRACKS TO - - - GOD !

Jan Van der Veken



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Appendix to Jeevadhara 61

to the Attention of our Inland Subscribers

Though the printing charges and the price of paper more than doubled during the years 1979 and 1980, we have been reluctant to raise the annual subscription. And so we found it extremely hard to meet the large recurring yearly deficits. Hence we are constrained to raise the subscription a bit. In fact, some of our subscribers themselves advised us to do so and we are grateful to them for their encouragement and their increasing appreciation for *Jeevadhara*. However, those who have already paid the year's subscription need not pay the balance.

From 1981 onwards we are trying to get postal registration; then, as far as the Postal Department is concerned, *Jeevadhara* both English and Malayalam will together form an Anglo-Vernacular Monthly with at least a page of Malayalam matter in the English and as much English Matter in the Malayalam. But they will continue the same as before in all other respects. The annual subscriptions for English and Malayalam will be Rs. 20/- each.

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JEEVADHARA

The Problem of Man

MAN AND RELIGION

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Editorial

Man is privileged to be a religious being. Religion is as old as Man and religious vision and praxis are intimately woven into the texture of human history and culture. More than anything else it must have been the religious perceptions and sensitivity that kept Man alive and hopeful in his hazardous journey through history. It is also the religious intuitions and feelings that sustain Man's link with the permanent in the midst of the ever vanishing flux, with the meaningful behind the seemingly meaningless medley of occurrences, with the beautiful and harmonious amidst confusion and disorder. Without the religious vision human life would be, as Whitehead puts it, "a flash of occasional enjoyments lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience".

The potential that religion has for the human beings is immense. But more often than not the history of religions tells a different tale—the tale of short-sightedness and provincialism, of dogmatism and intolerance, of crusades and holy wars, and of other cruelties and horrors. Religion which should have served the ideals of humanity have often turned to be goddesses of mischief in human community. That is why the study of religion in its totality becomes imperative.

This issue of *Jeevadhara* is an attempt along this line. It deals with religion from a broader perspective aiming at a more comprehensive and realistic outlook on religions, not in their isolation, but in their possible convergence and mutual enrichment. This is the basic theme of the "Dialogue with Panikkar". Locating the roots of religion in Man's experience of his being-not-yet-fulfilled which is a constitutive dimension of Man, Panikkar gives the broadest possible definition to religion as to include also those who are traditionally considered anti-religious or a-religious like the Marxists, Humanists, dialectical Materialists. They are not outsiders according to Panikkar, but real partners to religious dialogue. More specifically, Panikkar advocates dialogue between the major religions of Mankind—a dialogue which has to begin within oneself as intra-religious dialogue which is a meeting and cross-fertilization of religions. In spite of the limitations that a direct conversation entails, Panikkar deals with the different levels of religion, relativity, absoluteness and other profound topics.

M. Singleton examines Christianity's claim to absoluteness in the light of sociology and other related disciplines. From the fact that sociological factors influence religions in their making Singleton shows how a universal religion is an impossibility, a chimera. However, as a sociologist he finds reasons to opt for Jesus. Similarly, far from absolutely relativising all religions, he leaves room for the relative absoluteness of one of them.

The problem of religious language is the focus of attention of Joseph Mathew Angadiyil. The theologians of old were concerned with vindicating the truth of the religious assertions. But today the problem raised is whether such assertions have any sense at all. Joseph Mathew examines the various attempts to establish the meaningfulness of religious propositions and contends that without stopping at that one has to re-discover also their cognitive dimension for which he advocates the re-introduction of natural theology.

Thomas Vellilamthadam looks at religion, especially Christianity, as it concretely is and finds the religious principle which has to sustain Man's relationship with transcendence, in alliance with the social forces thus degenerating into the 'maya religious principle'. Bemoaning such evils of the established maya religious principle' as ritualism, rigorism, privatization of virtues, emphasis on personal salvation, masochism, ignorance of social complexity, anti-intellectual trend and sadism, Vellilamthadam pleads for the recovery of the authentic religious principle.

In most of the religious traditions God is of central concern. To prove His existence was one of the major tasks of religious apologetics. But such proofs eventually fell into disrepute, though not the God-problem. Van der Veken sets out to search for the 'tracks to God' especially in such moments of our experience as our solidarity with other people, our surrender in love, our experience of reality as benevolent and beautiful.

We need to continue the study of Man's religiosity and its expressions in history. There are grounds to hope that it could lead to a deeper understanding of Man and his problems as he finds himself in the company of his fellow beings and as related to the world at large.

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Abraham Koothottil

Man and Religion: a dialogue with Panikkar*

Abraham Koothottil (K): This issue of *Jeevadhara* has the theme: "Man and Religion". It proposes to deal with religion as a human reality inasmuch as the religious dimension is constitutive of the human being and religions part of Mankind's history. On this background, it would also deal with the phenomenon of the plurality of religion and the claims to absoluteness. These are in fact questions with which you were concerned since quite some time in your attempt to enter into dialogue with religions and here one notices a certain evolution in your thought in the course of time.

Raimundo Panikkar (P): These questions are certainly very important and central. But immediately I have to add that they are not my major concern now. Perhaps the evolution which you mention that I have gone through entails also a shifting in the main field of interest. I think that we should not be dealing all the time with scholastic queries instead of jumping into the real Christian issues which are not reflective issues as to how nicely we formulate our own self-understanding, but more direct ones concerning how we articulate the real understanding of human problems. So I do not like to be entangled in these kinds of theoretical issues, because, though they have been important for me, important still I think for very many people, they are not the most vital and central issues of theology today, and last, of Christian theology. And having as it were discharged my conscience we may enter now into more specific points.

K. All the same these questions are of relevance even for today, because it is only from a true self-understanding that the Church can truly carry out its own mission.

* This dialogue with Panikkar took place on August 2, 1980 at his residence in Kodaikanal.

P. I feel yes and no. Christ was not a Christian and St. Francis did not have so much of a self-understanding; he just let his Christian love, faith and hope, enter into action; the same with Benedict and the theologians of later times. They were not only writing Summas. They were active in the middle of the struggle, at the university of Paris or at Salamanca or in the streets of the big cities.

K. As you mentioned St. Francis of Assisi I am reminded of what Whitehead once remarked about him in a similar context. He remarked that it was hardly credible that in St. Francis "the two worlds, that of grace and mercy, and that of eternal damnation, could exist in one and the same breast".¹ In general Whitehead's observation about the Catholic Church was that "nearly all things Catholics do are right, and nearly all the reasons they give are wrong".² In this sense he noted that their hearts were right but their heads were wrong, and that there was no appeal from their heads.³

P. It is true, there is a certain inconsistency. Yet if I were to argue with Whitehead I would quote from that extraordinary Chinese book, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, which so much impressed C. G. Jung: "When the right man makes use of wrong means, the wrong means work in the right way; but if the wrong man uses the right means, the right means work in the wrong way". So I will not put it in the way Whitehead does because I know enough of hermeneutics to be aware that we should not project alien categories even using the same words into a person of another world. Hence I would not make much fuss about such inconsistencies. What I would do here is to apply the proper hermeneutics to understand St. Francis. In the field of hermeneutics I distinguish morphological, diachronical and diatopical hermeneutics. I am engaged now to develop this latter. It is a kind of hermeneutics in which we are conscious that the topoi, the locuses are totally different, and that we have

1. Price, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*, as recorded by Lucian Price (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 1954) p. 176.

2. Quoted from W. N. Pittenger, "Whitehead and Catholicism", *Theological Studies*, 32 (1971), p. 659.

3. Cf. L. Price, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*, p. 176.

not only just a diachronical gap, but also a diatopical one which is also important. To bring an example, if I smile at an ape it sees my teeth and may attack me. We take for granted that smiling is a sign of sympathy; it is not true. There are indeed major problems in understanding the different religions. That is why I say that the problem is a two-way traffic which means that I cannot have real understanding of the whole problem if I tackle it only from one single point of view, in spite of my good will and generosity. And I feel that the conversion into the other side is necessary, in order to be able to understand what is all about in the other religions. The hell of St. Francis is not Whitehead's hell. In short, interreligious dialogue has to begin with intra-religious dialogue.

I. What is religion?

K. Shall we take up that point later? I would like to ask you here something about the very religiousness itself. You say: "... there exists something like a fundamental religiousness, a constitutive religious dimension in Man, an inbuilt religious or basically human factor, whatever we may care to call it".⁴ What does this 'fundamental religiousness' of Man consist in?

P. Very simply and philosophically it is the sense of... (here you can choose any word) unfulfilment, of non-realization, of being not yet finite (I am playing with words), of being infinite, of being not yet achieved, of not being a *Jīvan-mukta* etc. This sense of incompleteness along with the conviction that it can be somehow fulfilled is the fundamental human religious dimension.

K. The German anthropologist Gehlen characterizes the human being in comparison with other animals as more open, more undetermined...

P. I agree, but here I would be more Indian. What I am speaking about is the consciousness of my unfulfilment, of my openness (open means that I am not yet closed) of not being *perfectum*, of being not *samskṛta*, being still in the possibility

4. R. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 69.

of growing, of learning, or ultimately of perfection, of salvation. Thus, the fundamental religiousness in my opinion is that dimension of the human being which makes it conscious of its infiniteness in the sense of not being finished. I am unfinished and at the same time do believe in the possibility of fulfilling, achieving, somewhat complementing that character of not being finished, which I discover in me or in any other human being. That is why for me every human being has the religious dimension, and as I have written in a small paper,⁵ religions have no monopoly of religion. Humanism, Scientism, Marxism, dialectical Materialism, Maoism, or the business mentality of a technocrat can equally be religions, not quasi religions, as Tillich wanted them to be, but simply religions, whereby religion does not mean in itself necessarily something good or true.

K. Only that they do not recognize and call it religion?

P. *De nominibus non est disputandum*. That is why when I call religion *path to salvation* I make this fundamental analysis: There is the human situation, X, and the end to which I strive, Y, — the latter may be heaven, *nirvana*, nothingness, just society... — and the path that leads from X to Y, that is what I call religion.

K. When you speak about faith, you characterize it as “a constitutive human dimension” inasmuch as it is the “existential openness” ‘to an evermore, which many traditions call transcendence’⁶ and its function according to you is to “connect me with transcendence”.⁷ The experience of faith you call “a human experience”⁸ and a “primal anthropological act”.⁹ Now, are the ‘basic religious dimension of Man’ and faith the same or how are they distinguished and related?

5. Cf. R. Panikkar, “Have ‘Religions’ the Monopoly of Religion?” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol. XI. No. 3 (Summer 1974), pp. 515–517.

6. Cf. R. Panikkar, “*Rtatattva*:: A Preface to A Hindu-Christian Theology”, *Jeevadhara* 49 (January–February 1979), p. 29.

7. R. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 18.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

9. *Ibid.*

P. The relationship between faith and religion is clear. Religion is the path; it is the objective thing if you want, and that is why it has clearly a set of symbols which people believe would lead them to that ultimate destiny of the human being. And faith is the anthropological dimension in me. It is constitutive openness – and I stop here. When speaking in English or to Christians I say sometimes – in order to make it clear – openness to transcendence; but I am unhappy with this formula, first of all, because it is not universal enough, secondly, because the moment we objectify transcendence, we miss the point, and thirdly, because all the Buddhist world will be upset and rightly so. It is not the openness to transcendence, it is just openness. Ultimately the two expressions say the same – for openness does not entail intentionality. When we are open, without further intentionality, we are open to transcendence, by definition.

K. What about the basic trust we experience? the basic trust that things are in order, that we are protected? Is it not also faith?

P. I would make here a distinction between faith and act of faith. I think this distinction answers many of the orthodox queries about my utilizing these words in a more fundamental way and yet not totally independent of the normal or Christian use of the words. The act of faith is the act whereby I, freely and consciously, accept that my openness be filled up with whatever I believe. But faith is not yet the act of faith. So faith is just this constitutional fact of being open, being unfinished and my consciousness of it prompts me to respond positively by this leap, and then you can say, by this trust. And yet I would not fill it up immediately with some positive connotation that everything will end up well; that there is a greater power, a good God, or whatever it is, that will give me the right answer. That is why faith is much more the question without assuming the type of answer, not even the vague one that things will somewhat end up well. The atheists are also religious in spite of the fact that they will not accept any of the answers which the traditional religions give. The answer you give is conditioned by history, culture and by every little thing.

K. Your definition of religion as a path to salvation or "the path Man follows in order to reach the purpose of life" is interesting. What would you say about another definition of religion: 'We call religion, in the most general sense the experienced relationship between the human being and the super-human power, in which he believes and on which he feels himself to be dependent'.¹⁰ Two pages later the same author makes another statement: 'the scientific study of religion is confronted with the fact that there are no people on earth without a religion in the sense of our description above'.¹¹ Is this description applicable to all religions, to Buddhism for example?

P. I would not totally agree with these types of definitions. I understand what they want to say, but the field within which they speak, I feel, is too narrow. That field for instance would not encompass the Buddhists, the Marxists, the Humanists, the dialectical Materialists. And then we are already in that kind of mentality that wants to make everybody religious in my own sense. But if religion is constitutive of human beings they should also have it in order to be human. For me, either religion is an ornament, then I can dispense with it, or something so basic that if I don't have it I do not act up to the mark of my humanness. So this kind of definition is inadequate from my point of view. I would disagree with those fundamentalists who would defend implicitly that kind of view. Only if religion is a fundamental human dimension it will have to be taken seriously. Of course, then you will say: *homo religiosus*, in the sense that every human being is religious, and you cannot define religion as the experienced relationship with the supernatural power, because such a power does not exist for many. So I think that those definitions only give a limited version of what religion

10. "Religion nennt man im allgemeinen Sinne die erlebte Beziehung zwischen dem Menschen und der übermenschlichen Macht, an die er glaubt und von der er sich abhängig fühlt" (H. - J. Schoeps, *Religionen: Wesen und Geschichte*, Munich: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1979, p. 13).

11. "Die Religionswissenschaft steht vor der Tatsache, dass nirgendwo auf der Erde Völker gefunden worden sind die keine Religion im Sinne unserer obigen Beschreibung besitzen" (*Ibid.*, p. 17).

truly is. You know the contemporary discussion about the content-definition and functional definition of religion, and some people like Peter Berger would say that a purely functional definition will not do. I agree with him that one has to put in some content. But this content would depend on space, time and culture. For you and me, for all the people of a given time, we need some content. But this content is also part of the 'how' we understand the function. This is a subtle thing. He is right in criticizing that a purely functional answer will not do. But why? Because we always understand the function in function of some content. My point is doubly sophisticated. Only a functional definition may have universal validity; but this functional definition is empty as long as we do not fill it up with some contents. And the contents of any given particular situation are essential. For instance, within the Abrahamic traditions in the Western world you cannot dispense with God. There you have to speak of religion in relation to a supernatural power. But what I am saying is that the very content is the function of how we understand the function of religion at a given moment in space and time as Sociology of Knowledge will tell us, and in fact we have experience from other cultures where the problem does not arise this way. And we cannot say that religion is something of which we have monopoly, because it has to fit into our *a priori* definition. Religion can be a human invariant only if it is a symbol allowing for polysemy and polyvalence and not a concept according to our contents.

2. Relativity of Religion

K. From your understanding of religion, there follows a certain relativity (not relativism) of the existing religions. Because the ultimate religious fact present everywhere requires explicitation, and therefore, "may have different names, interpretations, levels of consciousness and the like".¹² You affirm the relativity of religions also from the fact that "everything is wrapped in an utter relativity of radical interdependence".¹³ If this is true, how to understand theologians like Rahner still affirming the absoluteness and superiority of Christianity? Though with successive

12. R. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 57.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

qualifications, Rahner's statement that "Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all men, which cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right"¹⁴, sounds very triumphalistic to say the least. The pity of it is that we uncritically repeat such theologies also in our part of the world.

P. I agree with you. My concept of relativity is first of all a philosophical one. I would also say that it is a fundamental theological question. Everything that is, is wrapped in that radical relativity. That is why the very concept of the absolute is a self-contradiction. There is nothing that is totally *absolutus*, *solutus ab*. If absolute, everything is so solipsistic that it cannot have any relation whatever; not even with the mind. Truth according to Thomas Aquinas is relation, is adequation. All the transcendentals according to the Scholastics are relations. The very content of *unum*, *res*, *pulchrum*, *quidditas* etc. is relational. The first one who spoke about *Absolutheit* was Hegel, and I would say that those who speak about absoluteness are contaminated by the Hegelian spirit.

So that the problem for me, to begin with, is purely philosophical. It is the question of understanding what absoluteness means. But in theology it is not that kind of absoluteness that they are speaking about. It is more a historical absoluteness, assuming that history is the myth in which they all live. It leads to the arrogance that one has the privilege of an absolute standard which again is a contradiction in terms. A standard is there to serve as a measure to something, and therefore not absolute in itself. Rahner's position is somewhat nuanced inasmuch as he says that Christianity understands itself... etc. Here I would make a big jump perhaps. I may try to clarify a point which for me is very important which I have tried to develop in the second revised edition of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*¹⁵ which is to come out very shortly. It is the middle step or the stepping stone towards my position now. I felt consciously bound

14. K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, V, translated by Karl H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), p. 118.

15. R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964).

to explain it to myself and to the community of scholars and theologians so as to be open to criticism. And it is this: the metaphor of the rainbow may help. Seen from the outside, one colour is only one colour. There are several colours and one colour cannot claim monopoly of all the colours. Seen from within, I am able to see all the colours in my own colour. I am in the violet, from there, I would see the whole rainbow. I am not seeing less than what you are able to see from outside. So I am bound to see if I am deep enough all the religious experiences of mankind from my own religion. And I will have to see Christ as absolute in a similar way. I will have to take the *pars pro toto*, and see the *totum in parte*. My assumption is that nobody is outside the rainbow; only that some see it all from one colour and others from another colour.

I will make here a very simple formulation. By and large, Christians have seen God — I am using the word as a symbol for the whole reality — *in* Christ, but have forgotten that they have also to see the symbol God *through* Christ. It is not only *in* Christ, but also and mainly *through* Christ that they have to see the symbols of the divine or religious symbols of any other religion. And if I am deep enough, I cannot just say that my religion—whatever it is—is only one colour. Whose are then all the colours together? Nobody's. It is an abstraction. Who is outside? Or as I used to say, How can there be a no-Man's land in the land of Man? Such a no-Man's land from which I can see the whole spectrum does not exist. The only thing is that I realize that that which I cannot but see green, a) other people see it violet, b) is neither green nor violet but all the colours. So it would be a diluting of the Christian message to say, well, we have a pantheon of Gods or of avatāras or of saviours. I think this is philosophically weak and theologically untenable. I am not for a pantheon of religious symbols in peaceful co-existence. I am for the *perichoresis*, for the *circumincessio*, for the mutual dance and interpenetration, if you want — and yet one colour is not the other. So within the one I see all, but as a Christian I don't think I can say that my symbol is just one among the many. Then I cease to be a Christian. My symbol is how I see the totality, but others see it differently — and with closer looks at some parts of this very totality which for me are too distant to see them clearly.

K. But that is not the same as giving Christianity a normative status. The theologians want to keep up the normative status of Christianity I think, because of the conviction that Christian religion resulted from God's 'self-revelation'. This is what blocks their ability to see. Now, how to understand the Judeo-Christian claim to God's self-revelation? Has not the religious consciousness of mankind reached such a level as to free itself from a restricted notion of God's self-revelation?

P. Certainly. I would disagree with that kind of *Deus ex machina* who reveals himself and of that kind of revelation that can dispense with Man, the recipient of that revelation. Or as the scholastics say, *quidquid recipitur, ad modum recipiendi recipitur*. So even if the true God were that kind of God all the divine things he says have to be received in this earthen vessel of me, an Easterner, a Westerner, a Man of the 20th century, with all the implied limitations. So there is little use for grounding Christian superiority on divine revelation, for the moment it comes to me it shares in my own limitations. Concerning the orthodox views that when God reveals himself he gives also the right understanding, I would say, He gives the kind of understanding for *me*. But these kinds of understanding are all human. So I would find fault with a literal interpretation of revelation—and we are here purely on theological grounds. This God who reveals himself is too anthropomorphic and that kind of revelation is too objectified, too much put on the side of the objectum, forgetting the recipient, the beneficiary of that revelation. The moment I touch it, it becomes human and no more exclusively divine.

K. So your view regarding the absoluteness and normative status of Christianity is certainly different. You confessed recently that "Christian exclusivity has never been [your] cup of tea".¹⁶ All the same, it seems that you held at an earlier stage some kind of absoluteness of Christianity. In *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, you state: "Christianity presents itself as the catholic religion, as the full and universal religion... (This fact) prevents us from considering it as *one* religion among others..."

16. R. Panikkar, "Response to Harold Coward", *Cross Currents* XXIX, 2 (Summer 1979), p. 191.

Christianity is the fulness of religion and thus the real perfection of every religion.¹⁷ In an article written in *Jeevadhara*,¹⁸ your position became more nuanced; there you make a distinction between Christianity and Church; what goes in the name of Christianity has no universal validity, whereas, Church is universal "as the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the leaven for the whole lump, the Church functions and sows seeds destined to grow in many a different soil".¹⁹ Here some sort of a normative status is granted to the Church because "not only can she fit in with the most diverse milieu, she can embody and transmute the most diverse religions".²⁰ From your recent writings it seems to me that you have overcome also this stage. This is clear from what you said of your own experience that 'you 'left' as a Christian, you 'found' yourself a Hindu, and you 'return' a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian'.²¹ Here, there is no talk of any 'transmuting'. You also clearly affirm: "ultimately I would not accept absolutizing Christianity in order to consider that its truth has an exclusive claim that monopolizes salvation . . ." ²² and "in so far as it is a historical religion, Christianity belongs to history and should not transgress the boundaries of history . . ." ²³ This follows also from your striking rainbow model to understand the relativity and mutual relations among religions about which you spoke above.

I hope you would agree that in all this there has been considerable evolution in your thought.

P. There is a certain evolution, and there was also a certain misunderstanding regarding my views. Part of the misunderstanding of the first edition of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* comes out of two main reasons: 1) I wrote almost in a cryptic way, not out of strategy, but out of the desire to be understood by traditional Christians. 2) I had not clarified

17. R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, p. x.

18. R. Panikkar, "Christ, abel, and Melchizedek", *Jeevadhara*, 5 (1971) pp. 391-403

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 399-400

20. *Ibid.*, p. 400.

21. R. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 2.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

23. *Ibid.*

enough what I have later more explicitly formulated. So when I speak of religion, of Christianity to make it very clear, I speak of religion 1, religion 2, and religion 3 (r^1 , r^2 , r^3) or Christianity 1, Christianity 2, and Christianity 3. It is this: Christianity 1 is Christendom, is Christian culture, is Canon Law, Christianity lived in an incarnated, and thus limited but effective way. It is the whole socio-cultural set up in which a religion is alive. This is Christianity 1, or r^1 in general. Christianity 2 or r^2 is, to speak in Christian vocabulary, the sacramental level, the ecclesial level, the *sacramentum mundi*, the *ecclesia extra quam nulla salus*, if you want. This is not identical with the Processions, with the Canon Law, with Pius XII or Bonifacius VIII; it is deeper and yet is always visible, material; it is the tantric aspect, the sacramental dimension, the psycho-spiritual-material fact into which you enter through religion 1. The moment you become mature in any religion you discover that it is very good to go, say, to the *Meenakshi* temple, but that the important thing is not just *Meenakshi*, but something beyond, behind and yet not totally severed from its symbol. The religions, i. e. religions 1, are all on the same level. Christianity 1 is not better off than any other religion. It could even be worse. It is for the historians to decide. Religions here are all equivalent, are historical facts. However on the sacramental level (r^2), all these religions are complementary to each other. They complement and often supplement each other. These are living symbols through which I enter into that which religions stand for: the fulfilment of my being. And then there is religion 3 which Christians call the Mystery, the centre, and that cannot be complementary because there cannot be many centres. My approach to religion 3 is always limited depending on r^1 and r^2 . So that I cannot say regarding religion 3 that it is one or many; there is neither one nor many. I see it in and through r^1 and r^2 reaching as far as I can r^3 . But I do not exhaust r^3 at all. And other people (Muslims for example) through Islam 1 and 2 reach also Islam 3. And they see the mystery in that light. I am not saying that we are saying the same thing with different names. First, because r^3 cannot be properly described; and, secondly, because I am not a nominalist, so that the name I give belongs to the thing in a certain way. This is one aspect which I do not know how it tallies with the other,

but we are entering into that realm in which we can only babble up, totter and somewhat figure out.

Yet the name is fundamental. Because this name is the way in which the religion 3 reveals itself to me. So the realm of the relations of the different religions cannot be solved saying that they are all the same and only the name is different or that they are all different, and only mine is good or the best. To bring another example, I would agree that all the paths are leading to the summit; but if we would delete all the paths the peak would collapse; the paths are somewhat necessary for the peak. So the peak is the sum of all the paths, and even more, yet I cannot go to the peak without following any one path. If my path is a real path, it leads to the peak; and for me it is the only path that leads to the peak. Catholic orthodoxy is certainly right in affirming that Christians are climbing up the mountain. But from one slope you may not be able to see the climbers of other valleys.

K. The point is that one can also cross over to another path, if one wants to, without making such a big difference.

P. That depends on your *karma*, or on your guts if you want a secularized expression, or on your conscience. But if you are now in the 20th century, you cannot live in the 13th. If you are now between the Hindu and Christian traditions you cannot say by any stretch of imagination that you are a Melanesian, or a shaman. My possibilities are limited. I said, I 'left' as a Christian, 'found' myself a Hindu, and 'returned' a Buddhist, but I did not say, a Melanesian, a Sikh or a Jew. Because that has not been my experience which only will allow us to speak of religion in the singular.

K. In your "Response to Harold Coward"²⁴, you allow your explanations to be considered a *retractatio*. What did you mean by it precisely?

P. I spoke there of *retractatio* imitating Augustine. I am responsible not only for what I write but somewhat also for what

24. Cf. R. Panikkar, "Response to Harold Coward", *Cross Currents* XXIX, 2 (Summer 1979), pp. 190-192.

people understand of it; it was not a figure of speech; I was taking to my account that people misunderstood me. Because one of the burdens of writing is that one has to be able to make oneself understood as one wants to be understood. Hence it is partly my fault — in that sense it is a *retractatio*, and a sincere one. Not in the sense that I said one thing at one time and another thing now. It is true, I see it clearer now. I feel in myself an evolution, a growth and even a mutation; a mutation, because I for one, was educated, and in a way indoctrinated, in the most Tridentine way, in Spain, Germany and Rome. In those days, I had to be taught. Now there is a mutation in which there is a radical change and at the same time a continuity. It is a case in which a change in consciousness has taken place and has not broken me in the sense to give up everything and become a television writer, or give up my priesthood and go on to be a teacher of Portuguese, or whatever it is as it has often been the case. No, that is not what has happened to me. What goes on in me is perhaps representative of what goes within so many people. I may have the privilege or gift of being able to formulate it or feel the responsibility of formulating. I do believe in the priesthood, I do believe in the Church, even in the Roman Church in the most sincere and real way. And because of that, first of all, I do not blame anybody, and secondly, I take all these pains at explicating it not in a professorial way saying 'here it is', but as a witnessing of what goes on within the mind and heart of a person for whom Christ is still the symbol. So I do not intend at all to dilute the Christian message and in that sense and only in that sense, not in the sense you rightly criticize, I am not inclined to water down the Christian message. One of my main concerns at this moment is to study how one can really be an involved Christian and at the same time not fanatic and provincial. Yet this does not mean that I am engaged in apologetics. It is my search for truth that convinces me that truth is universal inasmuch as it is also concrete, incarnated, existential if you so prefer.

K. Speaking about the logic of religious growth itself elsewhere you have pointed out how in the Judeo-Christian traditions there is the growth from the circumcision of the body to the circumcision of the heart and that according to the same logic, there

should be a growth from baptism to the baptism of the spirit. Growth in religious consciousness would imply finally the overcoming of religion itself?

P. There is a semantic problem here. We tend very often to objectify religion and project it somewhere as a body of self-existing concepts of reality. This is not the case. Religion is only real in my religiousness. Religion ultimately is called upon to become personal. If I don't have my own specific religion as my own, then my religion is an indoctrination from without or a mere superstructure; it is still something which I have merely learned without assimilating it and I repeat it like a parrot. The real living religion is my personal religion. It is unique, and in some way intransferable; it is different from yours. And this is the real reason for mutual tolerance and personal identity. It is not like all of us having the same model, the same type of jackets to put on; and then if you are little smaller or bigger it does not fit you. and you have to leave that Church or religion. You remember the Scholastics talking about the virtue of *religion*.

K. That is what the official Church seems to do now. They are trying to fit people into their version of religion.

P. This is what I have called microdoxy. We have to speak seriously. I don't play that game. It is as simple as that. But this is not what the Church is speaking about, not what religion is speaking about.

K. I would like to have a small point clarified concerning the three levels of religion which you distinguished above. On the first level, which is the level of religions like Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism, we can name them quite distinctly. But when we come to the second level, the level of the sacramental structure these names and distinctions become weaker. But on the third level, everything merges into one. Here should we use Christianity, Buddhism etc?

P. Very well put! Yes and no. I think that here a radical humility is called for. I cannot have access to r^2 and r^3 if not through r^1 . I do not come from Mars nor from the moon to go straight into the heart of the matter. I have my parents,

my education, my language etc. So I am bound to identify – that is what I did in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* – r^1 , r^2 & r^3 . If I am following the Canon Law x I do it because it has a connection with Christianity 3. But the moment I see that that canon has no connection with r^3 I let it fall by the wayside. The relation can be extrinsic, intrinsic, historical, because of magisterium etc., – there are very many qualifications. I cannot say I am the pure one who has access to a hot line connecting me to religion 2 and 3 without religion 1. I must have the humility to accept that I have my own prejudices, my own colours, and biases and limitations. I cannot completely disentangle myself from r^1 , r^2 and r^3 . And those who reject r^1 , who wash their hands like Pilate because they do not like to share in the sins of their fellowmen, and get out of the Church, they should also get out of the planet. I think they are reacting naively to say the least. By burning my passport I will not exonerate myself of the sins of my compatriots, wherever they may be. By saying I do not belong to this Church I have not done much. Tradition is not something you can rid of at will. You may divorce your wife, but you cannot change your parents. And you may know the irony of the Christian topic about the Church as the *casta meretrix*, the chaste whore. But this does not obviously mean that we should not purify religion more and more.

K. If you can call it Christianity, wherever you find r^3 , a Hindu has equally the right to use the term Hinduism wherever he finds r^3 , also in Christianity.

P. That is right. I told Rahner a few years ago in a meeting as he spoke for the first time of anonymous Christianity, that I could accept the thrust of all what he said provided he accepted also that he was an anonymous Buddhist.

K. That is what he would not accept, perhaps...

P. He said that he did not know much about Buddhism. Then I retorted that if he did not know much about it he should not call a Buddhist an anonymous Christian either.

K. A related question: Now, if you are sufficiently aware of the deeper levels of religion (r^2 and r^3), is it not possible that

you live with that realization and form in a way your own kind of r^1 , without belonging to any historically expressed form of religiousness on level r^1 ?

P. In the making, yes. My whole *Rtatattva* as a Hindu-Christian theology is a plea for a Hindu-Christian religion and a plea to the ones and the others not to excommunicate us, destroying themselves in the process. We have a future only in mutual fecundation; in isolation none has a future.

K. I feel in this connection that some of your recent interpreters overlooked this. I have especially Ewert H. Cousins in mind. What he understood to be your contribution is that you have elaborated "a complex hermeneutics of world religions which would allow one to maintain simultaneously the absolute claims of Christianity while respecting and affirming the absolute claims of other traditions".²⁵ I think that this is a misrepresentation of your accomplishment.

P. I agree that my problematic is somewhat different.

K. There seems to be inaccuracy also in Cousins' some other statements in his attempt to spell out the characteristics of your theology. He understands you as attempting "to retain your Christian identity, while plunging into the experience of other religions and affirming their authenticity and autonomy".²⁶ Your concern as far as I could understand is not so much to retain the Christian identity, but really to grow in religious consciousness through mutual fecundation which may sometimes call for even the loss of your previous identity.

P. I don't care to lose what you call identity. Cousins seems to speak of the Christian identity in terms of loyalties and sociological categories.

K. I also feel that Cousins' understanding of your method as shamanistic is unfortunate. According to him "in primitive religion the shaman has the power to leave his body in spirit and

25. E. H. Cousins, "Raimundo Panikkar and the Christian Systematic Theology of the Future," *Cross Currents* XXIX, 2 (Summer 1979), p. 151.

26. *Ibid.*

travel to distant places, acquire knowledge, and return to pass this on to the community".²⁷

P. I feel the process is more dangerous than going out and coming back more enriched. That is why I speak of mutual fecundation, and mutual fecundation—I will go along with the metaphor—implies *maithuna* which may create a child, a new creature. For Christians I would say *in Christo nova creatura*.

K. This has been clear to me as I read through your writings. You have made it clear that the true dialogue implies a risk and you have to take it...

P. A total risk, of dying, and you believe that you may rise again, but you really don't know it. The resurrection is not a trick. There is real religious risk in religious dialogue, if you take the faith or beliefs of all your fellow beings seriously.

3. Absoluteness of Christ

K. Shall we pass on to another point namely, your understanding of Christ. You say that "Christ is the symbol, which Christians call by this name, of the ever-transcending but equally ever humanly immanent Mystery".²⁸ Elsewhere, you are more clear: "And my contention is that Christ is one of the names of this mystery".²⁹ Christians can call the transcendent Mystery by the name Christ, the Hindus have equally the right to call the same Mystery by the name Kṛṣṇa.

P. Absolutely.

K. But to avoid confusion in dialogue, is it not better that Christians avoid the name of Christ and Hindus of Kṛṣṇa; then both can without further ado come to that point, which is central to both the parties.

P. That is where I have some difficulties. I think that I cannot put Christ in 'epoché', because, the understanding I have of the

27. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

28. R. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 37.

29. R. Panikkar, "Response to Harold Coward," *art. cit.*, p. 191.

Mystery (r³) is a Christian one. I will call it Christ. You may call it Kṛṣṇa if you like, but since you are a Christian, it will be a very Christian Kṛṣṇa. And a Hindu may call it Christ but it may be very much a Vaishnava Christ. That is the mutual fecundation. If I am aware that my name does not exhaust the thing I don't think I have to renounce the name as long as the name has a meaning. So I cannot give up the name Christ and call it the spirit, God, or the divine reality...

K. The divine reality perhaps?

P. To me it is too disincarnated, and here I may be too Christian if you want. In the particular speech I can say that by Christ I understand that divine reality, although I am somewhat unhappy with the expression: divine reality. I think Christ is more universal as a symbol than God. But it has to be understood. The symbol God is much more limited than the symbol Christ. To me the symbol Christ is cosmotheandric, i.e., Christ is matter, time (history) and divinity. God, generally speaking is not historical, and not material, and so is a more limited symbol ultimately.

K. On the other hand, God would be more universal a symbol because Christ belongs to one particular tradition, whereas the concept God to more than one. Moreover the common understanding is that Christ refers to Jesus.

P. That yes. I speak under a correction; but I do not like that the common people lose their total bearings. The name Christ may slowly disappear perhaps; it is a very Greek name.

K. Originally it means the same person as Jesus; only your type of theological reflection would make a difference.

P. Well, Jesus was not in the beginning of the world; Jesus was not the Alpha and the Omega; the Eucharist is not Jesus...

K. But as a title it refers to Jesus.

P. From that point of view I agree with you. But for me Christ is much more than that. It is a symbol, and the symbol God does not afford the same function. Besides, for Buddhism, God is no symbol. But the symbol of Christ would be less objectionable to them. As a matter of fact we have no universal

symbols. We live in co-existing worlds of broken myths. The emerging myth has not yet come out. The symbols like justice, democracy etc. are still too much historically connected. Now, neither Christ nor God, you are right. Here we touch a much more fundamental problem. But I would not like to throw the name of Christ overboard too quickly; instead I prefer to deepen the understanding, in order to be adherent to reality. There are millions of people who call themselves Christians. Well, I cannot just say: "you have been using the word wrongly and therefore drop it." I would say instead: try to have an understanding of your Christianity, in a way that it ceases to be that kind of fanaticism, provincialism and exclusivism that it used to be once upon a time. So the moment I relativize the name, I think that the dangers of keeping the name are avoided and its advantages are kept.

K. You say that "Christ is the only mediator",³⁰ you say also that Christ is "one of the symbols" referring to the deeper reality.³¹ How do you reconcile these two assertions?

P. I congratulate you for your questions. For me the name is the symbol. It may be that I am little bit Hindu, but for many people that is the only name. And I will not contest not only the legitimate right to say that, but the real truth it contains. It is through this name that they reach the deeper Mystery. Here I would do my little bit of exegetical machiavelism. I would say, incorporating Phil. 2:9, because of the emptying of himself, because of *Kenosis*, because of the *śūnyatā*, God gave him a name, which is a *Supername*. That is the only way of putting it through in English. That which saves is the only name of Phil. 2:9. It is not Jesus, not Christ, it is a *Supername*. It is the name you invoke in any authentic invocation. But I cannot say thousand names at the same time. But I may say Allah, Kṛṣṇa, Justice, or classless i.e. just Society. And that is the name out of which there is no salvation. The name is really a vocative, something with which you shout and cry out. Otherwise, it is not a name, only a tag.

30. Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 36.

31. Cf. R. Panikkar "Response to Harold Coward" *art.cit.*, p. 191.

K. A name which evokes the deeper reality?

P. But which is in and through the name. That is why I repeat I am not a nominalist. The name incarnates the thing.

K. Also because of historical reasons?

P. Historical or anthropological reasons. So it is not the Kantian thing - a thing in itself. It does not exist. Christ or God do not exist in an abstract sense. There is no creator without creatures, there is no God without me, there is no Christ without my belief in him. So if I cut one of the ends I cut everything.

K. As one name Kṛṣṇa would equally be good for the Hindus in that sense....

P. In that sense, yes. Any name will do. Not only Kṛṣṇa, but Justice, classless Society, service to the neighbour....

K. The confusion which I found in your use of the name Christ is partly due to the fact that most of the time we take the names Jesus and Christ as synonyms, referring to one and the same person. Is it not more straightforward then to keep them so and be modest about our claim and say that "there is a primordial theandric fact that appears with a certain fullness in Jesus, but that is equally manifested and at work elsewhere".³²

P. As you say most of the time we take Jesus and Christ as synonyms. But we should make a distinction: Jesus is the Christ. This is the Christian *mahāvākya*. But this sentence cannot be reversed without qualifications. Christ is not Jesus only. It is *in* and *through* Jesus that I discover the Christ, if I am a Christian. But once I have discovered the Christ, in that mystery I discover that centre in which everything converges which I as a Christian cannot call but Christ. I don't have to call it Kṛṣṇa; but I may understand, as a Christian, that the Vaiṣṇavas call it Kṛṣṇa. Or the atheists call it differently. What has spoiled this understanding is, on the one hand, Platonism, and on the other, Kantianism, namely, that there is something totally independent of my calling, of my belief, my naming. Outside it there is nothing. The model of two-story level reality is misleading. Reality is a trinitarian

32. R. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 57.

(advaitic) *perichoresis* or interplay of three constitutive dimensions. This is what I call the cosmotheandric intuition: the whole of reality is material, spiritual and intellectual.³³ So it is not that I am stuck with a name, Christ. I can go without it, if you want. But I will not like just to drop it, for convenience sake or for a strategy, or because Christ has had a bad press or bad reputation. I would prefer to purify that name, rather than dispense with it. If one adopts the name of Kṛṣṇa, as many in the West do now-a-days, it would be a Christian version of him, and a revised form of Christianity. It is really amazing. The whole thing comes out more or less in the Indian garb.

K. Is it because Christianity has become so much a part of themselves?

P. Yes; it is not just because of the name. That is what leads me to sponsor this kind of mutual fecundation and real religious dialogue. These people are extremely important; they are our bridges, and though despised by others, they may contribute to the mutual understanding more than we think.

K. You pointed out from different angles the need of going beyond the constituted religions for which the dialogue with other religion and ideologies like Marxism can help. From this point of view you distinguish between belief and faith, where belief belongs to the constituted aspect of religion and can come to a point of crisis, in dialogue. The reason for this according to you is that "certain credal formulas deriving from a naive, under-developed cast of mind may not answer the needs of a more highly developed people".³⁴ I thought that you had some clear cases in mind when you wrote this. Could you specify at least some?

P. Well, I could propose here any example; the whole Bible, the symbol of Nicea etc. Let us not make the trick of the

33. Cf. R. Panikkar, "*Colligite Fragmenta: For an Integration of Reality*" in F. A. Eigo (ed.) *From Alienation to At-oneness*, Proceedings of the Theology Institute of Villanova University, Villanova, Pen. (The Villanova University Press, 1977) pp. 19-91.

34. R. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, p. 22.

canonists condemning divorce but accepting annulment of marriages, say, of 17 years with five children. Well, let us say that sacraments can also die like any mortal thing. Similarly, I can make another interpretation of the Nicene Creed which may fit perfectly well with this highly developed people. But could this interpretation of mine be the interpretation the pious men of Nicea would ever have dreamt of? So we are in the field of hermeneutics; I am not saying that any text yields the meaning I may want to extract from it; but any text says what it says-to us.³⁵

There is no doubt that a few centuries ago 99 percent of the Christians believed that God had created the world in six days of 24 hours each. Now nobody will believe that. If you want to believe it, you can do it, and say, that days do not mean days, and hours do not mean hours, or you can drop it altogether. What are the dogmas? They are channels through which I reach the understanding of something ultimate in the mystery of reality. So every time has its own credal formulations. And when the language was not changed, the understanding of the words changed. Because words are symbols.³⁶ As long as words have life I am ready to keep them. I would not just kill words. I discover that the word God, for example, is less universal than sometimes one means and more deadly wounded than some people wish it were. But one can purify this symbol. You are a specialist in Whitehead. I wonder how much his idea of God corresponds to the biblical Yahweh. And yet it may be very convincing.

K. Whitehead's approach to God seems to be from two sides. From the metaphysical side he comes to the understanding of the ultimate reality to name which he takes the word 'God' from the religions. Actually when we analyze more closely we see that the characteristics of his God do differ from those of the traditional understanding of God.

35. Cf. R. Panikkar's *Pancasūtra of Interpretation* in "The Texture of a Text", *Point of Contact*, New York, Nr. 5. (April-May, 1978), pp. 51-64.

36. Cf. R. Panikkar, "Words and Terms," *Archivio di Filosofia*, Roma (Istituto di Studi Filosofici) 1980, pp. 117-133.

P. That is why a man like Whitehead preferred to keep the word 'God' for the traditional understanding. But, on the other hand, a God before whom you cannot fall down in worship, before whom you cannot dance, make music, as Heidegger says, is an empty concept and does not warm your heart. That is a point in his criticism also.

K. But on the other hand, when you bow down in worship, you are making an idol of the real God.

P. You may be making an idol; but God has lot of idols; it may not be the real God for you, but if you go to the people, what they want is an icon, and they are a majority. It is here where I introduce the experience of the Trinity. It is one of my concerns to say that Christianity as I understand it, is not a monotheistic religion without being polytheistic either. And to save Christianity from being put in one sack with the Abrahamic religions of the semitic stock is one of the main things of the agenda of my proposed Jerusalem II.³⁷ Christianity has not yet developed sufficiently the potentialities of its own trinitarian intuition. And if you understand the implications of the trinitarian theology, you will discover that God has to have an iconic nature to whom you can bow, and make music and dance. That is necessary because you are also flesh and blood.

K. But then you have to grow beyond it...

P. Without abandoning the flesh. You see, angelism, the *bios angelikos* of the monks of the desert is a great temptation; of the Vedānta also. The temptation is to go so beyond everything that one leaves reality behind. And reality is matter, is concrete, is time, and space; it is not only divine in that sense. An abstraction will not do — one needs symbols. And that is the power and responsibility of religion. Religions may never be 'pure' (again Platonism!); Things are ambivalent. It could become a path of non-salvation as well. This is the seriousness of the religious vocation that we are not playing with the Gods or just making a game. It is a real risk, putting our whole life at stake.

37. Cf. among other writings of Panikkar his innuendo in "Rtatattva", *Jeevadhara* 49 (January-February 1979), pp. 18-19.

K. You referred to your experience of a symbiosis of religions in you, saying that you 'found' yourself a Hindu and a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian. It would be interesting to know in which respect you found yourself a Hindu, a Buddhist, and in what respect you still remain a Christian?

P. I find myself a Hindu, first of all because I come from a Hindu family. Hinduism resonates in me and I do believe in it. I understand enough of Hinduism not to identify myself with one particular doctrine also. I accept my *Karma*, I accept my earthly condition. That in no way stands in my being a Christian.

K. That is the same as accepting the will of God?

P. Yes, but I would prefer to say that I follow my *svadharma*. The problem arises out of this kind of exclusivistic thinking that we began to criticize at the beginning: to say, "If you are a Christian, you cannot be a Hindu, let us talk sense", is simply not true.

K. When you live in this new consciousness, where more than one religion meet and go into mutual fecundation, how do you characterize your Christian identity? It is not the former identity anyway...

P. Here I could give a very elaborate answer of philosophical nature. There are two ways in which one can get one's own identity; one by differentiation, the other by identification. Identity by differentiation would mean that I am a Christian because I am *not* a Hindu or Muslim. I am your God Yahweh because I *am* not the God of the Amalakites etc. In identity by differentiation your ways of thinking are governed by the primacy of the principle of non-contradiction. You are the chosen people because the others are *not* the chosen ones. I chose *you* and *not* the others. That is it: in choosing you (Israel) I don't choose the others (the Goïm). This kind of understanding has played havoc in the Christian outlook. I am a Christian because I am *not* like the others. This is getting identity by differentiation.

The other way to get my identity is by identification. I am what I am, and I *am* in as far as I accept my whole being. So my Christian identity is not at loggerheads with my Hindu

identity. I don't understand my Christian identity over against the others. I am not against the principle of contradiction. But it does not govern my ways of thinking. I am more an Indian in that sense; I am governed by the primacy of the principle of identity. So I am whatever I am able to be, to identify myself with. That would be the philosophical aspect.³⁸

And the more theological aspect: What makes me a Christian is that, for me, Christ is the symbol of truth, beauty, and of whatever is valuable. And if I find those things also outside the traditional field of Christianity, to me that is also covered, that is also Christian for me. So if I discover truth and beauty and goodness and value in Hinduism, as I do, that does not make me a non-Christian but a better Christian - a more complex, nuanced, complemented Christian. So from the Christian point of view, all that is good and beautiful belongs to Christ because Christ stands for that, and without interpreting it in any kind of imperialistic sense, this would make me a Hindu because I discover the Hindu values. In the Hindu point of view, the atheist, the agnostic, the theist, the polytheist, the advaitin - everyone can be a Hindu provided he accepts his Hindu *karma* and in a certain sense his own *dharma*. I can accept the Hindu *karma* and *dharma* and keep my own understanding. I said Hinduism is an existential reality, not an essential one. I do not have to sign any credal statement in order to be a Hindu, provided I do not reject what I am in relation to my Hindu or Indian being.³⁹

K. Is that synthesis something similar to what happened in the ancient Confucianist China which took in also Buddhism? Some rites the Chinese performed in the Confucianist way and the others in the Buddhist way.

P. Something of that type. But I would go a little deeper. Because it is not that I am a Shinto for marriage, for living a Buddhist and when I die I prefer to be a Confucianist. I mean it is not a kind of external amalgam - although the Chinese and

38. Cf. R. Panikkar, *Le mystère du culte dans l'hindouisme et le christianisme* (Paris: Cerf, 1970), pp. 37-41.

39. Cf. R. Panikkar, *Misterio y Revelación* (Madrid, 1971), pp. 26 sq.

the Japanese praxis is also different, because that compartmentalization in 'religions' does not occur. It is something that goes deeper. You can be a Malayalee and a Christian. You can be both. So I can be a Hindu and a Christian in that deeper sense that the two traditions are intertwined. And then, *a posteriori*, not *a priori*, I try to work it out also on the different planes I am capable of elaborating, for instance, on the doctrinal one. Here I am trying to see the complementarity, the mutual criticism of both doctrines, of a Hinduism seen with Christian eyes and of a Christianity seen with Hindu eyes. And that is the mutual fecundation, giving birth to something which belongs to the two. You are part of your father and part of your mother; but if I cut you into two pieces I kill you and the pieces are then neither father nor mother nor anything. Of course you are the synthesis of your father and your mother; it is a peculiar kind of synthesis. It is not that you are the two combined nor the two separated - as half here and half there; you are combined in such a way, that you are you. And you know, incidentally, that my mother was a Christian and my father a Hindu.

K. Is there not the possibility of reflecting on concrete practices on the basis of this deeper understanding and deeper synthesis? As priests, for example, we celebrate the Christian liturgy, and now-a-days taking enough freedom to make it a real experience. Why is it that we priests cannot also celebrate the Hindu liturgy?

P. Why not? To begin with we are priests according to the order of Melchizedek who was not even circumcized nor even a Jew and belonged to a tribe that was cursed by Yahweh. That has been my ordination. So certainly my ordination is not for one particular sect. So even from this point of view one could say that one's Christian ordination is an ordination which is valid even outside that little fold. Could we not also celebrate the Vedic liturgy? I say why not? And that would not be syncretism. There are different ways of expressing our religiosity, which are complementary. This is something that needs a lot of reflection, and in my *Kultmysterium*⁴⁰ I have tried to see how the one complements the other and how we can have a deeper understanding between the two.

40. R. Panikkar, *Kultmysterium in Hinduismus und Christentum* (Freiburg) / Munich: Verlag Karl Alber, 1964).

K. Regarding the possibility of cross-fertilization in the field of belief, there are ample possibilities to point out concrete cases, but you seem to avoid it. Is it for reasons of caution?

P. It is not for the reasons of caution, but for the reasons of prudence in the best sense of the word. It is easy to come out with a political 20 point programme which afterwards I am not going to fulfil. A religious manifesto cannot just voice my own idiosyncratic ideas. It has to gather and to lead to blossom what is germinating here and there. It is not just my own conclusions that are valid. There is an ecclesial dimension to it. It has to be living seeds which grow spontaneously. So you throw the seeds, you challenge and also you toil the ground, obviously. I am preparing a new edition of *Ritatattva* in which I am going to expand in what way we can have this mutual fecundation. The two examples I propose are the *Trinity* and *karma*. A Christian can believe in *karma* and a Hindu in *Trinity*, for instance. If there is growth, there is also evolution. The words of caution are a matter of prudence. It is not my personal belief that matters, but what carries conviction, because I succeed somewhat in interpreting something which is growing. It is something the importance of which the Indian theology here has by and large forgotten. We do not take even notice that the people do all sorts of things. Praxis is important and popular religion is paramount. The other day I went to a shrine. I thought it was a Hindu shrine, but it was a Christian one. Obviously, people cannot just swallow the packets of theologoumena brought from another country or another culture, and develop some kind of a schizophrenic thing that is coming more and more. So if the theologian has to express the belief of the community, he has to be able to articulate it and by articulating it helping it to grow. That is why I don't do theology *a priori*, nor as the magisterium either, proposing what people have to believe. I try to formulate what I feel to be the *intellectus fidei* which has also to come to terms with the *fides intellectus*. Therein lies also the vitality of theology.

K. That is a good word of conclusion, and I think we can wind up with that. I thank you sincerely for this dialogue which, I hope, has been useful to throw more light on some of the basic issues concerning Man's religiosity and its expressions in time and space.

Raimundo Panikkar
Abraham Koothottil

The Relatively Absolute and the Absolutely Relative in the Realm of Religion

Colours and women, according to the adage, can be freely opinioned about but not, in principle, religion. A Christian can have a good opinion about Islam but he cannot at one and the same time be a fully paid up member of the Church and of the *umma*. While a few "founders" of the marginal movements which later crystallised into mainline religions manifested a certain tolerance of rivals, their followers have almost invariably shown themselves to be far more fanatical. Jesus had no objection to the free lance use of his name; his embryonic ecclesiastics, however, already wanted to do to others what the Jewish hierarchy had sought to do to their Master but a few months earlier—no religious mission without a mandate from the higher clergy.

The shifting of a religious movement from the prophetic wings to the priestly centre stage is usually accompanied by the isolating out from the inspired message of a hard core of non negotiable ideas and immutable institutions - in the case of Roman Catholicism, for instance, one can list such doctrines as the Incarnation, the Virginity of Mary or institutions such as the seven sacraments, papal supremacy. These tenets and traditions are said to be for all men and all times. That religions declare themselves called to cover the world and eliminate all competitors is only human - one can hardly expect disciples to credit their masters with half hearted promises such as "I will be with you until circumstances determine otherwise"! Nothing short of eternal and universal relevance is capable of activating the religious zeal of some. The ways and means of achieving such universalism might oscillate between a Holy War and polite proselytism but convinced Christians and militant Muslims - to mention but the more notorious of religious absolutists - remain basically persuaded that their religion should, by divine right, enjoy an exclusive monopoly in the sphere of the sacred.

This kind of religion is but a good (or bad!) example of a more general phenomenon: the inbuilt tendency of ideologies towards intellectual absolutism and totalitarian institutionalism. The unbending dogmatism and hierarchical authoritarianism of Catholicism and Marxism have often been compared but a basic difference lies in the fact that whereas secular ideologies are known by friend and foe alike to be of purely human origin, religious ideologies are purported by their propagators to be divinely instigated and thus endowed with an essence beyond man's making. Man's role is but to market the deposited message as faithfully as possible. Hence the absolutism of religions is more radically un-accountable than that of secular world visions with universal pretensions.

Dialogue with those committed to a complete communion of mankind is difficult but at least the debate is carried on within the limits of interpretative frameworks founded upon empirical data. Dialogue with those crusading for the Christianisation of the world becomes impossible beyond the threshold where reference is made to a divine design known only by faith. As inspired writers have revealed God's will to save men solely through Christ, the Christian does not feel free to question the universality of his religion. The problem here is that there is no apodictic proof of anyone's inspiration being of divine origin. At one extreme, when a maniac like Idi Amin claims to act under God's orders, few would hesitate to dismiss such claims as illusionary. On the other hand, were I a Martian, I would have some difficulty in positing an essential difference between an African possessed by a spirit demanding sacrifices be made for rain and a French Catholic girl inspired by God to get rid of the English (Joan of Arc). In other words, the convictions of religious people that their faith is called by God to embrace humankind cannot be taken for granted but must be assessed in the light of a critical understanding of inspiration and revelation.

Exegetically speaking, the universality of Jesus' intentions is far from proven. His apostles, on the other hand, did believe their master's mission to have universal relevance and exclusively so. Their conviction, however, is more of a starting point of critical reflexion than a dogma to be taken on faith. It is not enough to discover what the Bible literally contains, an adult

faith demands that the message be sieved through epistemological and metaphysical meshes.

That the substance of his religion escapes empirical control is not a fact calculated to worry the theologian whose faith has remained impervious to the interpretative frameworks of the human sciences, on the contrary, he glories not only in God's existence but in His gratuitously entering into communication with His creatures - with some people and peoples more especially than others. It is not for such theologians that I write but for those who like myself are struggling to renegotiate their classical religious convictions in the light of ultimate criteria of credibility culled no longer from Hebrew "philosophy" or Aristotelian metaphysics but from psychology, sociology and related disciplines.

This effort is likely to be stigmatised as reductionist, as condemned from the outset to fall below the level of revelation, to ignore the dimensions of faith. When concrete examples are instanced, however, this dimension of faith often seems to be no more than the uncritical identification of the thrust of a religiously inspired person's words and deeds with the horizons of plausibility fixed by the philosophy which happens to prevail at a particular period or place. Let us take for instance biblical data about Satan, the dogma of the Devil which the teaching authority of the Catholic Church has defined as revealed and consequently binding on all men.

First the universalist's position: God's last word about the Devil was delivered when St John put the final full stop to the Apocalypse. This revealed doctrine was rendered more clear and distinct, more explicitly coherent and convincing by the work of Catholic theologians and Conciliar definitions over the ages. The nature of the Devil can be summarised for catechetical purposes as an objectively existing, purely spiritual personal being, entirely dedicated to effecting evil. It is felt that non-revealed or natural religions corroborate this supernatural tenet in that most of them echo a quasi-universal belief in evil spirits, even though this belief is often not quite correct or complete. The role of the Catholic missionary on this as on other scores is precisely to censure mistaken beliefs and amend inadequate ones

so that eventually all men come to know who and what the Devil really is.

Many years of practical experience with the possessed in Africa as well as with the literature about the subject have made me wonder whether the position just outlined does full justice to the biblical material let alone the data about spirits from other religions. It now seems to me that the interpretative categories of medieval scholasticism - purely spiritual, personal beings, objectively existing - do not so much in-form as de-form the phenomena from which faith should spring. I now feel that the inchoate and inconsequential appearance of much of the material about spirits both in the Bible and elsewhere - their lack of pure spirituality, their obscure objectivity - is precisely part of the message about spirits and as such is best left almost as it is and is certainly distorted by being squeezed into scholastic systematisations. The psycho-sociological understanding of "spiritual" phenomena both within and without the Bible far from failing to reach the level of revealed faith and/or a genuine understanding of "spiritual" existence, hits the nail more or less squarely on the head. It is the substantialist understanding of scholasticism (and conventional Catholicism) which is rationalistic, not the sociological interpretation; this latter is only seemingly reductionist because the former is excessively essentialist.

There is no reason to see other religions as feeling their way towards the fullness of revelation, indeed there is no reason to see revelation as having reached its definitive crescendo with the death of the last apostle. It is far more reasonable in the first instance to speak of each age and each culture as having that religion which most suits its needs. Categories such as "complete" or "correct" are too axiologically biased to make satisfactory sense of religious phenomena. The religion of the Pygmies is not "earlier" nor "inferior" to that of their Bantu neighbours in Africa. The religion of any people is first and foremost part and parcel of its culture as a whole and is usually quite adequate to their purposes. The religion of the earliest Christians is not "purer" nor more "perfect" than that of Roman Catholic peasants in southern Italy even though the popular Catholicism of these latter is often unfavourably con-

trusted with pristine purity of the apostolic age. The Catholicism of contemporary Italian peasants cannot be compared directly with the Christianity of first century Corinthians. There was and is good and bad, authentic and less so in both; both can be equally influenced by the spirit of Jesus; but since they occupy quite different socio-economic and cultural niches, their religious ideas and institutions can only be superficially similar - they will be as different as are today the religious ideas and institutions of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Jesuits.

What holds for the "Devil" and evil spirits could and should hold for "God" and good spirits and, for that matter, all other supposedly absolutely universal or universalisable religious ideas and institutions. A universal or universalisable religion of any substance is a chimera for the simple fact that no significantly similar social order prevails, has prevailed or is likely to prevail. Let us take another example. The structure of Pygmy society is such that there is absolutely no place for any specialist in the sacred of the sacerdotal type. Pygmies ignore the priesthood not because they are "primitive" but for the same reason that the early Christians wanted nothing to do with a clergy, namely the shape and size of their societies preclude the cultural category of priests—in the same way that they militate against the emergence of hierarchical authority in any form. Should there ever emerge a world society i. e. similar social structures throughout the world, then there will be in fact a universal ideology (religious or otherwise) of some substance to accompany it. Until such a time, absolutist pretensions will remain chimerical.

This point is important. In questioning the universal applicability or exportability of Catholic doctrine about evil spirits, my aim has not been to substitute hazy and shadowy ideas on this score for clear and distinct ones. The point is that the multiplicity of and ultimate incompatibility between different social shapes and sizes means that there can be no idea or institution of any significant substance common to them all. It is for instance possible to study the religions of hunter-gatherers, pastoralists and agriculturalists in Africa and create a common-denominator concept of a Supreme Being. This exercise in ethnographic erudition, however, is as futile as it is equivocal: there is no African who believes in such an abstraction since there is no general African but several different sorts

of Africans each subscribing to significantly different supreme symbols. The supreme symbol of the Pygmies is, for instance, so different from that of their Bantu neighbours that there is little point in designating them both as "God". Substract from what in the Bantu supreme symbol is part and parcel of Bantu social structures, substract from what in the Pygmy supreme symbol is part and parcel of Pygmy social structures and you will end up not with an absolutely universal supreme being of substantially the same solid significance but quite simply with a weak, vacuous generalisation. Labelling this latter's supposed traits with high sounding pseudo philosophical terms such as omniscient or omnipotent does not solve the problem. What counts in the last analysis are the specific differences between the "God" of the Pygmies and the "God" of the Bantu. You could only get Pygmies and Bantus to subscribe to substantially the same idea of "God" if you persuaded both of them to move into the same social place and space. It is not for nothing that converts to Catholicism in Africa resemble, psycho-sociologically speaking, their European counterparts. The reason is simple: to believe as Roman Catholics do you must behave in the main, socially, politically, culturally and economically as they do. It is not for nothing that Roman Catholicism in Africa has made no inroads amongst hunter-gatherers and pastoralists: the reason is simple: Roman Catholics are neither hunter-gatherers nor pastoralists.

The sociologist in me is thus highly sceptical of any ideology's claim to absolute universality i.e. to its eventually embracing the whole of mankind with its specific identity intact. Socio-logically speaking mainline Christianity has now little in common at the level of ideas and institutions, with the marginal messianic millennialists whom it continues, none the less, to consider as its originators. The proof? the impossibility of mainline Churches to win over the Christian sects who are socio-logically speaking, the direct descendents of the first followers of Jesus. (Socio-logically speaking the ideas and institutions of mainline Christianity are on a par with those of Judaism at the time of Christ. The superficial gap which separates the Jewish High Priest from the Supreme Pontiff of Rome should not blind us to the substantial continuities at the social, political, economic and other levels.)

On the other hand and paradoxically though it might seem, it is precisely the sociologist in me that allows me still

to opt for Jesus. (Not as his first followers did - I do not occupy the same socio-economic niches they did; like Nicodemus and Gamaliel, I belong to the bourgeois intelligentsia, and my dispositions towards Jesus are more on a line with theirs than with those of lower class artisans, fishermen and the like.) A sociologist is at his best and happiest delimiting and describing the belief and behaviour concomitant upon occupying different social, economic, cultural, political and other niches: upper class, priestly caste, liberal professions, the proletariat, marginal messiahs, nomads etc., etc., - all such clearly defined places have their corresponding patterns at the level of ideas and institutions. Yet at the same time the sociologist is very conscious of the fact that his angle of approach cannot account for individual idiosyncracies. He can put his finger upon the working class mind after having analysed the working class milieu but he cannot say why worker X prefers to keep pigeons and worker Y canaries; he cannot determine why Mr A and Mr B both working within the same factory and at the same machines have divergent levels of job satisfaction. The sociologist can for instance make a quasi-exhaustive study of the social, economic and related factors which gave rise to the art forms of 20th century Europe. Yet when all has been sociologically said and done there remains at once an individual's choice of and a cultural consensus about the most impressive modern artist. Most people, amateurs or experts, would be inclined to put Picasso in a class of his own, while accepting that his production together with that of his contemporaries, can be explained in social, economic, political and other similar perspectives.

Likewise with Jesus: the sociologist has no difficulty in finding the Nazarene's niche. History as well as the modern world abounds in marginal, wonder working messiahs. Jesus, however, is outstanding in his league, like Picasso, almost unique in his genre. This is not the place to detail the uniqueness of Jesus - the reader is referred to synthesis such as the recent one of Hans Küng or to Belo's remarkable materialist reading of Mark. Suffice it to say that this exceptional specificity of Jesus can be maintained even in the face of the most minimalist hypotheses: let us suppose - *concesso non dato* -

- with the liberal exegetes that the resurrection is to be taken less than literally
 - with the death of God theologians that Jesus' monotheism is negotiable
 - with radical Christians that egalitarian, non-sacramental and non-sacerdotal basic communities should constitute the sole ecclesial centre of gravity
- etc., etc., ...

it still remains that Jesus of all the activators of human energy, as Teilhard would have put it, is phenomenologically speaking, relatively absolute. In other words, even if Jesus is only a man, even if he never intended to found a Church, even if his understanding of transcendence (human i. e. immortality, and supra-human i. e. theism) are questionable, there is still every reason to prefer him on purely phenomenological grounds to all other outstanding activators of human energy who have yet appeared in history. (Whether it is necessary to believe he will ever remain so is another question. But again, conceding someone more "energising" could appear in the future would not alter the present manifest superiority of Jesus in this respect.)

The sociology of religion does not then lead to indifference, to concluding that all religions are much of a muchness. Far from absolutely relativising all religions it leaves room for the relative absoluteness of one of them. The decision as to which of them is preferable can be taken on purely phenomenological ground without recourse to supernatural signs. These grounds, however, are persuasive by their uniqueness rather than their universality. Jesus is outstanding not because he synthesizes the best bits of all religions. There is no reason to suppose the percentage of those attracted to his beliefs and behaviour would be higher now than it was 2000 years ago. There is no reason why Jesus' appeal should be more universal now than it was initially. On the contrary there is every reason to suppose that people will go on reacting to him in substantially the same way and proportions as they did during the couple of months he prophesied in Palestine. The universality or relative absoluteness—if you will, of Jesus comes from the unique way he located himself with regard to the top, bottom and centre as well as to left and right of his society (i. e. with regard to the rich and the powerful, priests and politicians; with regard to the wretched and the poor, the lepers and pariahs; with regard to the middle class, the respectable and responsible bourgeoisie; with regard to the freedom fighters, the urban guerrillas and terrorists; with regard to the monks and mystics, the charismatics and pious do-gooders). No one before him nor after him—at least up till now—has been able to believe and behave beyond these socio-economic niches in quite the same inspiring way as he did.

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Semantics and Theology : a *status questionis*

Discussions on the meaning of religious language are of recent origin. For the philosophers of Anglo-Saxon analytical tradition, clarification of the meaning of religious statements is more important than the establishment of their truth. In contrast, the traditional discussions regarding religious beliefs were mainly concerned with establishing the truth of religious assertions; the issue of their meaning was often neglected. Thus, for example, for St. Thomas Aquinas, the crucial question regarding God is the truth of His existence, not whether the proposition "God exists" is meaningful. It is only after proving God's existence that he deals with *De Divinis Nominibus*, that is, with the language that can be meaningfully used to talk about God. But for the analytical philosophers, the primary issue is whether the assertion "God exists" has a meaning or whether it is a bogus proposition. In their view, if a particular statement lacks clear meaning, it is useless to try to establish the truth of that statement.

In particular, concern with the cognitive meaning of language is characteristic of analytical philosophy. All the prominent philosophers of this tradition have dealt with this problem. Russell's theory of descriptions, Wittgenstein's picture theory of language, Ayer's principle of verification and Popper's principle of falsification are but different attempts to suggest how language refers to reality. As it is always the case, discussions in theology closely follow the developments in philosophy. Hence the question of the cognitive meaning of religious and theological language has become a major challenge for theologians. "In a sentence the issue is whether distinctively religious utterances are instances of the cognitive or of the non-cognitive uses of language."¹ In this article I propose to present a *status questionis* of this problem.

1. John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: Macmillan, 1973; Collins Fount Paperbacks, 1977), p. 1.

I

Aristotle defined man as a rational animal — *to zoon logikon* — which literally means logical animal. The Greek word *logikon* is derived from the verb *legein* which means “to say”, “to speak”, or “to discourse”. Hence *to zoon logikon* finally means “speaking animal”, “the animal which has language”. Language has many functions. Wittgenstein lists the following: giving orders, reporting an event, forming and testing a hypothesis, presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams, making up a story and reading it, guessing riddles, making a joke and telling it, solving a problem in arithmetic, translating from one language to another, asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, and praying.² Wittgenstein calls these different functions of language by the name “language-game”.

Logicians usually speak of four uses of language. First, language can be used to communicate information—the informative or cognitive function of language. This is accomplished by affirming or denying propositions. For example, “Mrs. Indira Gandhi is the Prime Minister of India”, which is a true proposition. Or “Akbar was a German emperor”, which is false. Informative discourse has cognitive meaning since it is used to describe the world and to reason about it. Secondly, there is the expressive language which is concerned, not with reporting any information, but is used to express or arouse feelings and attitudes. We express our emotions and feelings by saying, “Oh my God!” “What a pity!” “Fantastic!” etc. Expressive discourse is neither true nor false. Thirdly, language serves the directive function when it is used for the purpose of causing or preventing overt action. The clearest examples of directive discourse are commands and requests. For instance, “Close the door”, or “Please go to your seat”. Finally, there is the performative language which in appropriate circumstances performs the action that it appears to report. Performative verbs such as “christen”, “congratulate”, “promise”, and so forth perform the actions denoted by them.³

2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tran. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953; Paperback edition, 1974), p. 11, para. 23.

3. Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic* Macmillan, 1953; Collier-Macmillan, fourth edition, 1972), pp. 45-51.

We can distinguish the same fourfold functions in the language used by religion too. First of all, there are propositions in religious discourse, which communicate something and so can be legitimately called informative. Thus the proposition, "God is the creator of heaven and earth", has been traditionally taken by Christians to be a true proposition which communicates something about reality, and so has a cognitive meaning. Of course, Christian believers admit that there is a logical difference between an affirmative proposition of common sense language such as, "Sanjiva Reddy is our President", and a religious statement such as, "Christ is the Messiah". Secondly, religious discourse abounds in expressive functions. The reason, as the phenomenologists of religion have rightly recognized, is that, intense feelings such as awe, tremor, fascination and even repulsion are connected with religious experience. Such experiences give rise to expressive utterances. Thus, the apostle Thomas expresses his faith in Christ saying, "My God and my all!"

Thirdly, there are many directive uses of religious language; for there is hardly a religion without a moral code. And moral commands are expressed in the form of directives such as, "You shall have no other gods before me".⁴ Or "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour".⁵ Many pronouncements of the teaching authority of the Church are in the form of directives either explicitly or implicitly. Finally, there is no lack of performatives in religious discourse. For there is practically no religion without rites and ceremonies; and the language that is used in religious rituals is predominantly performative. Thus the baptismal formula, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit", is not a report of a religious function, but the formula itself performs what it appears to report. In fact, the central formula of all the Christian sacraments is performative in nature.

II

Though it may be a generalization, it can be said that traditionally, theologians emphasized the informative or the

4. Exodus 20:3 (RSV).

5. Exodus 20:16.

cognitive element of Christian faith since faith was for the most part interpreted in a predominantly intellectualistic manner. According to St. Thomas, "... to believe is immediately an act of the intellect, because the object of that act is *the true*, which pertains properly to the intellect".⁶ Hence he defines the act of faith as "... a habit of the mind, whereby eternal life is begun in us, making the intellect assent to what is non-apparent".⁷ Of course, St. Thomas admits that faith is not purely an act of the intellect and that will too has an important role to play: "The intellect of the believer is determined to one object, not by the reason, but by the will, wherefore assent is taken here for an act of the intellect as determined to one object by the will."⁸ St. Thomas explains the mechanism of the role of the will as follows. The intellect assents to a thing in two ways. First, through being moved to assent by the very object. Secondly, the intellect assents to something, not through being sufficiently moved to this assent by its proper object, but through an act of choice whereby it turns voluntarily to one side rather than to the other. If this be accompanied by doubt and fear, there will be opinion while if there be certainty and no fear of the other side, there will be faith.⁹

This analysis of the roles of the intellect and will in the act of faith clearly shows that just as science, faith too is concerned with knowledge. In the case of science, it is evidence that moves the intellect to assent to truth, whereas in the latter case, certainty of truth is supplied by the will, and the intellect assents to truth. Hence the role of the will does not make faith a less intellectual act. The truths of faith are proposed to the believer in the form of propositions. "Now a man cannot believe, unless the truth be proposed to him that he may believe it. Hence the need for the truth of faith to be collected together, so that it might the more easily be proposed to a man,..."¹⁰ The articles of faith are collected in the form of a symbol.¹¹ There are seven articles referring to Godhead, and seven dealing with Christ's human nature.¹²

6. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II, 2, q. 4, a. 2.

7. *Ibid*, q. 4, a. 1.

8. *Ibid*, q. 2, a. 2.

9. *Ibid*, q. 1, a. 4.

10. *Ibid*, q. 1, a. 9.

11. *Ibid*.

12. *Ibid*, q. 1, a. 8.

The foregoing analysis of the Thomistic notion of faith clearly shows that it emphasized the propositional, informative and cognitive aspect of Christian faith. The act of faith is first and foremost an intellectual act, and as such it is concerned with knowledge of things rather than with human feelings and attitudes. Faith tells us how things are. Hence the propositions and articles of faith could properly be said to be true; and the inauthentic and spurious interpretations of faith—called heresies—were false. Stressing exclusively the propositional and cognitive element of Christian belief, later Thomists and scholastic theologians built up theological systems far removed from the experience of the believers. The attitudinal dimensions of faith as well as the role of will in the act of faith were to a great extent neglected. Theology tended to become an abstract intellectual game. The idealistic philosophical movements of the modern era too played their part in making theology rationalistic. Theologizing went ahead without regard to the concrete experience either of the individual believer or of the worshipping community. In the words of Torrance, "Detached from the empirical reality of the living and acting God, theology tended to become abstract and rationalistic and got stuck in arid ideas and inflexible frames of thought, losing its relevance for the life of faith."¹³

III

Reaction to such deductive theology and rationalistic system-building had already set in with the Protestant Reformation. Luther and the founders of the Protestant movement stressed the experiential factor in the knowledge of God in contrast to the dry speculations of Scholastic theology. In fact, Protestant theologians have for the most part travelled this path of emphasizing the experiential and concrete aspect of Christian belief, very often neglecting the propositional and cognitive element. Neo-orthodox theologians, making use of the phenomenological method and existential categories, attempted to give systematic expression to this experiential knowledge of God and to interpret the Christian message in terms of concrete

13. Thomas F. Torrance, *God and Rationality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 3.

human experience rather than through abstract metaphysical categories. Even Catholic theology, once the champion of the propositional element of Christian faith, has begun to go along the Neo-orthodox way, as a counter-move against the abstruse Scholastic speculations, far removed from the concrete life of religious believers. Existential and Neo-orthodox theologians preoccupied themselves with the meaningfulness of Christian faith. This is clear from the fact that very often the proposed aim of theologizing was to render Christian message "meaningful" to modern man. Thus "meaning" for the most part was interpreted not as cognitive meaning, but as "meaningfulness"—meaning-for-me or meaning-for-the-human-subject.¹⁴

Existential theologians had a handy tool at their disposal for the investigation of the meaningfulness of Christian beliefs, namely, hermeneutical phenomenology. What are the implications of such existential-phenomenological theology for the cognitivity of religious language? We shall examine this question in some detail. Phenomenology was originally conceived by Husserl as a rigorous method for the description and essential intuition of the essences of the various phenomena of experience. It was a careful, methodical study of immediate experience, its characteristics and structures, eschewing all interpretations and theories

14. Invariably this mode of theologizing starts with man and his concrete experience. In fact now it is almost a dogma that theology has to start with anthropology. But it is curious and odd that while sciences have radically altered the place of man in the universe, philosophy and theology have extolled him to the heavens, making him the beginning and end of all knowledge and understanding. The astronomical discoveries starting from the Copernican revolution have highlighted the fact that man is an insignificant being, inhabiting a small planet of a medium size star—the sun; astronomers have calculated that there could be as many as one million inhabitable planets in our galaxy—the Milky Way—alone. Similarly, evolutionary theories have stripped man of all his pretensions to dignity and greatness by the hypothesis that, after all, man has an animal ancestor. The anthropocentrism of contemporary theology as well as of modern philosophy could be interpreted as a reaction to, or even as a substitute for, what the sciences have mercilessly done—to rob man of all his pretences.

which might explain and so explain away aspects of experience. Classical phenomenology was used as a method for the description of essential meanings of phenomena in various fields of experience, such as ethics, aesthetics, anthropology, religion and so forth. Phenomenological method as practised by Husserl and his immediate followers tended to create an ideal world of essences in the subjective world of immanent subjectivity.

Husserl's remarks on *Lebenswelt* (living world) were in fact a virtual repudiation of such an ideal world constructed by the pure ego, abiding in a realm untouched by concrete existence. Basing themselves on the notion of *Lebenswelt*, later phenomenologists began to modify the phenomenological method. This in effect was a return to the world of concrete experience. According to Merleau-Ponty:

To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie, a river is.¹⁵

The purpose of phenomenological analysis is no longer to achieve an intuition of the essences of the phenomena we experience. Instead of analyzing with apodictic precision what appears in immediacy, the new development of phenomenology seeks to unveil what had on the level of ordinary experience been hidden or forgotten; the given becomes a clue to what is concealed. This kind of phenomenology is called "hermeneutical" because it seeks to interpret the latent meanings, that is, to unveil the implicit structures of man's being in the world, structures not evident to our normal self-understanding.¹⁶

15. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "What is Phenomenology?" in Joseph Bettis, ed., *Phenomenology of Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1969), p. 13, reprinted from the preface of *Phenomenology of Perception*. trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

16. Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), pp. 279-80.

For classical phenomenology, "meaning" referred to essential meaning. Now what is the meaning of "meaning" that is relevant to hermeneutical phenomenology? According to Tracy¹⁷ and Gilkey, "meaning" here refers to "meaningfulness", by which is meant the relation between concepts and concrete, lived experience. It points to the relation of symbolic forms to our apprehension of the *Lebenswelt*, to the way we apprehend the total range of felt experience. If these symbolic forms do not thematize some element within, or some dimension of, the experienced totality, then these forms will not *mean* anything to us as assertions about reality.¹⁸ Thus in the new phenomenology meaning is a product of a relation of verbal symbols and concepts to felt, lived experience as a whole. In this conception, linguistic symbols cannot communicate, that is, have meaning if they do not function to thematize some significant areas of common experience; conversely, if they do so function, then *ipso facto* they have or can have meanings.

Such hermeneutical phenomenology is used to locate religious language on the horizon of human experience, or to peg it to certain human situations and thus to lay bare the meaningfulness of religious statements. The religious phenomenologist, making use of this tool attempts "to examine actual lived experience, and to uncover there... the latent but pervasive and immensely significant dimension of ultimacy and sacrality which forms the continual horizon of man's being in the world".¹⁹ According to Gilkey, the following symbols are used to thematize this dimension of ultimacy, and are meaningful in this horizon of human experience: "The gods, great and small, of religions are examples of this: the Kami, Mana, Dionysius, Zeus, Shiva, Vishnu, Kwanyin—and so on infinitely."²⁰ The Christian symbol of "God" is only one of the symbols, found meaningful in this dimension. Gilkey analyses the human experiences of contingency, relativity, transitoriness, freedom and meaning of life in order to locate in them the horizons where Christian discourse is found to be meaningful.²¹

17. David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 66.

18. Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind* p. 209.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 280-81.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 298.

21. *Ibid.*, 305-415.

Thus under the influence of phenomenology and existentialism, the task of theology was interpreted as discovering the dimensions in human experience, where the Christian message is meaningful and as translating the Christian beliefs into existential language that is meaningful to modern man. Though it is a well-meant enterprise to start theologizing with the concrete experience of the human subject, often such theology tends to become reductionistic which "converts theological statements into anthropological statements and indeed into autobiographical statements".²² This means that often the step from existential-phenomenological theology to atheism pure and simple is a short one. According to such a theology, the actual content of the statements about God,

is our own 'self-understanding'. You do not understand God out of Himself, but out of your own self. That was the fatal step taken by Bultmann in his famous essay of 1925 about the sense in which we can speak of God. But once you have taken that step you cannot stop there; the next is forced on you, when 'God' becomes not so much a cipher of your relations with God but a cipher of your relations with your fellow human beings. And so there emerges the completely secularized man, the man of 'religionless Christianity', who does not resort to prayer because he does not want a 'daddy God' that comes to his help when he is in trouble, for after all he is now a 'mature' human being flung upon his own resources; nor does he need 'the hypothesis of God' or a 'God of the gaps' to help him over the mysterious places in life, for all that is only an 'occult' way of thinking that is primitive²³.

Thus excessive preoccupation with the existential-phenomenological meaningfulness of Christian beliefs and the neglect of its semantic aspect result in nothing less than outright atheism.

The point of these remarks is not that phenomenology is not a valid method in theology nor that the concrete existential

22. Torrance, *God and Rationality*, p. 50.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

experience of the human subject is not a legitimate starting point for theologizing, but that the theologian who altogether neglects or refuses to involve himself in religious semantics and to discuss the question of the cognitive meaningfulness of religious discourse is on the verge of endangering the theological enterprise itself. Phenomenology is indeed a very useful tool for exploring the meaningfulness of religious beliefs and statements. But as a method of analysis of experienced phenomena, phenomenological analysis cannot move beyond the clarification of the meaningfulness – meaning-for-the-human-subject – of the area of experience under investigation. It has an in-built mechanism for eschewing all questions of explanation, and of the referent of the phenomena it analyses. Applying this to religious beliefs, we can say that the phenomenological analysis “shows what is meant, if religious symbols are used. But it cannot go beyond the description. Phenomenology cannot raise the question of validity of the phenomena it makes visible”.²⁴ This is also the point of Hepburn’s criticism of Bultmann that “Bultmann’s methods and terminology tend to insulate his claims against the possibility of verification and falsification (using these words in their widest sense); ...”²⁵ This in fact is the fundamental limitation of phenomenological method as well as of existential theology. But this limitation can be overcome only if one engages oneself in religious semantics and deals with the cognitive aspect of religious beliefs and language.

IV

Existential-phenomenological theology had an ally in “linguistic theology” in its refusal to deal with the semantic aspect of religious language. Whereas the former limited itself to phenomenological meaningfulness, linguistic analysis confined itself to the conceptual elucidation of the language used by religious

24. Paul Tillich, “The Meaning and Justification of Religious Symbols”, in Sidney Hook, ed., *Religious Experience and Truth* (New York: New York University Press, 1961), p. 7.

25. Ronald W. Hepburn, “Demythologizing and the Problem of validity”, in Antony Flew & Alasdair Mac Intyre, eds., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955); study edition, 1972), p. 228.

believers. Thus there is a clear convergence between existential theology and "linguistic theology" in their refusal to take into account the cognitive aspect of religious discourse. In the words of McLain:

Under the influence of Kierkegaard, Buber, and others, existentialist theology has argued persuasively for the non-theoretical, practical character of religious belief; it has, of late, discovered inspiration and assistance for this position in the reflections of recent analytic philosophy on the difficulties involved in speculative philosophy. The resultant theological point of view is one... which holds that the meaning of religious language is to be found exclusively in its use.... It follows that religious beliefs and conceptions are intelligible in their own right and do not need to be explicated or justified with the aid of an ontology or metaphysic.²⁶

In fact, such convergence between existential theology and "linguistic theology" is something to be expected since as methods of investigation, phenomenology and linguistic analysis bracket questions of cognitive meaningfulness of the subject under inquiry. Indeed, there is a striking similarity between the methodologies of Husserl, the originator of phenomenology, and Wittgenstein, the author of linguistic analysis. A common accent with both thinkers is on the phenomena in their meaningful structures. The point is not to ask what something is — explanation — but how something shows itself. Husserl conducts this investigation within the scope of the transcendental consciousness; Wittgenstein carries on this within the scope of language.²⁷ Because of these similarities between the two methodologies, "Linguistic analysis may rightly be called 'linguistic phenomeno-

26) Michael F. McLain, "Analysis, Metaphysics and Belief", *Religious Studies* 5 (October 1969): 29

27) Cornelis Van Peursen, "Edmund Husserl and Ludwig Wittgenstein", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 20 (December 1959): 185

logy'".²⁸ Manazan concurs: "This way of investigation [linguistic analysis] might aptly be termed 'linguistic phenomenology' but without the essentialistic nuances of Husserl's phenomenology."²⁹

According to linguistic analysis, the function of philosophy is the clarification of language, that is, the elucidation of the meaning of its concepts and rules for its use. The philosopher tries to give an account of the use of the particular language-game in question. In Wittgenstein's words: "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is."³⁰ Thus philosophy is clarificatory, descriptive activity. It does not explain or explain away anything. "Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain."³¹ Philosophical analysis is not concerned with any factual question, but it deals with conceptual issues, with the clarification of concepts. As Winch puts it, "But the issue is not an empirical one at all: it is *conceptual*. It is not a question of what empirical research may show to be the case, but of what philosophical analysis reveals about *what it makes sense to say*."³²

Another way of construing the task of philosophical analysis is to say that philosophy is concerned with the elucidation of the depth grammar of language. According to Wittgenstein, "In the use of words one might distinguish 'surface grammar' from 'depth grammar'. What immediately impresses upon us about the use of a word is the way it is used in the constru-

28) Jerry H. Gill, "Linguistic Phenomenology", *International Philosophical Quarterly* 13 (December 1973): 535. Gill points out that it is J. L. Austin who coined this term. See "A Plea for Excuses", in *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 130

29) Mary-John Manazan, *The "Language-Game" of Confessing One's Belief* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1974), pr 46

30) Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 49^c, para. 24

31) *Ibid.*, p. 50^c, para. 126

32) Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 102

ction of the sentence, the part of its use — one might say—that can be taken in by the ear. And now compare the depth grammar, say of the word 'to mean', with what its surface grammar would lead us to suspect."³³ The surface grammar — what we ordinarily call grammar — gives us the minimal rules for the use of an expression. It is concerned, for example, with the declension of nouns, conjugation of verbs and the correct combination of words to form a sentence. But depth grammar is concerned with the rules and uses of a particular language-game. In the words of Phillips: "Depth grammar is made explicit by asking what can and what cannot be said of the concept in question. To understand the limits of what can be said about a concept, one must take account of the context in which the concept is used."³⁴ This in fact is the conceptual elucidation of the particular form of discourse in question.

Applying this notion of philosophy as conceptual elucidation to the problematic of religious language, we may say that the philosopher of religion, making use of linguistic analysis, attempts to clarify the concepts of religious discourse and to lay bare the rules for its use. "Its task would be seen to be a descriptive one: that of bringing out the kind of language involved in religious belief and the notions of reality embodied in it."³⁵ According to Phillips, a prominent philosopher of analytic tradition, this implies that philosophy establishes neither that God exists nor that He does not exist. But this does not mean that philosophy establishes agnosticism as the only appropriate response to religious claims. Hence "It is not the task of the philosopher to decide whether there is a God or not, but to ask what it means to affirm or deny the existence of God".³⁶ But in doing so, the philosopher may help to solve the difficulties that bothered a believer or an atheist, but that was not the aim of his inquiry. Philosophical clarifications may open up or bar the

33) Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*, p. 168^e, para. 664

34) D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), p. 4

35. *Idem*, *Religion Without Explanation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), p. 4.

36. *Idem*, *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 10.

way to religious belief. But these results are unpredictable and they are not the business of philosophy.

Making use of the method of linguistic analysis, Phillips attempts to clarify the logic of the language of prayers and of the concept of God. In his opinion, religious discourse possesses certain absolute and necessary features. His analysis of the language which the religious believer uses when he prays, shows that it has a tautologous character such that nothing can count against it. Thus according to Phillips, the prayer of thanksgiving, if genuine, has to be offered both for good and evil in life, that is, *whatever is the case*.³⁷ Similarly, petitionary prayers are not bargains with God but such prayers “do end with the words, ‘But thy will, not mine...’”³⁸ Moreover, in Phillips’ analysis, the rules for the use of the word “God” warrant speaking of God as necessary existence, not as a matter of fact, that is, as a logically contingent being.³⁹

Apart from the clarification of the concepts and the rules of religious discourse, Phillips stubbornly refuses to admit, let alone deal with, the cognitive meaning of religious language. Here he is quite consistent with his methodological tool, namely, linguistic analysis. For just as in the case of phenomenological method, linguistic analysis too has an in-built mechanism for bracketing all questions pertaining to the cognitive dimension of language. As a method of investigation, it can be used only for the clarification of the depth grammar of the language-game in question. With regard to the language used in religion, a philosopher can, employing this tool, merely indicate the rules of the religious language-game, elucidate its concepts and specify what makes sense or does not make sense to say in religion. But the basic limitation of linguistic analysis is that, though it

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 96-98; *Idem.*, “Religious Beliefs and Language-Games,” *Ratio* 12 (June 1970) : 42-45; *Idem.*, *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 208-209.

38. *Idem.*, *The Concept of Prayer*, pp. 98-103; 112-19; 122; 130; *Idem.*, *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, 128-29.

39. *Idem.*, *The Concept of Prayer*, pp. 18-23; 81-82; *Idem.*, *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 1-4; 16-18; 31-32.

is a very useful method for clearing up confusions which are purely linguistic in nature, it is unequipped to raise the question of the semantic aspect of religious discourse and to discuss the issue of its cognitive meaningfulness. Thus "Having clarified the grammar in an area of discourse it leaves untouched the question of the ontological status of the terms and concepts involved. By itself it does not contain the wherewithal to promote us from the conceptual to the ontological level".⁴⁰ Hick, an untiring defender of religious semantics, too makes an almost identical point when he says: "The unacceptable feature of the position [of linguistic theology] is that... it deprives religious statements of 'ontological' or 'metaphysical' significance."⁴¹ In other words, merely by clarifying the conceptual meaning of religious utterances, one does not and cannot solve the question of its cognitive meaningfulness. For "There is still a need to explain *how* religious assertions can have cognitive meaning... In this sense, even the moves to more moderate forms of linguistic analysis have not taken the question of cognitive significance out of its central place"⁴² Thus, after all the efforts to do justice to the phenomenological meaningfulness and conceptual meaning of religious discourse, there persists stubbornly a logical reminder or a linguistic plus: its semantic aspect. As methods of investigation, phenomenology and linguistic analysis can hardly move beyond the clarification of the meaningfulness and meaning of religious statements. But it is one thing to recognize the limitations of these methods, another to refuse to deal with the cognitive dimension of religious statements.

V

It is against the background of the existential-phenomenological theology and "linguistic theology" that we must assess the significance of the objections of logical positivists against the claims of religious discourse to cognitive meaning. In fact,

40. Joseph Fitzpatrick, "Philosophy of Religion: The Linguistic Approach", *Heythrop Journal* 19 (July 1978) : 239.

41. John Hick, "Sceptics and Believers", in *Idem*, ed., *Faith and the Philosophers* (London: Macmillan, 1964), p. 239.

42. Lyman T. Lundeen, *Risk and Rhetoric in Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), p. 3.

in its demand for the justification of the cognitive meaningfulness of religious statements, logical positivism has done a great service – albeit a negative one – to contemporary Christian theology. It highlights once again the importance of the propositional element in religious belief. The logical positivists challenge to the cognitivity of religious discourse and the efforts of philosophical theologians to respond to it have been very timely ventures. These have brought to the fore the urgency of grappling with the problems of the semantic element and the irreducible propositional factor in religious language.

According to the logical positivists, the question of the cognitive meaning of a language is logically prior to the question of its truth. For, one cannot and should not inquire whether a statement is true if it has no meaning. The same situation obtains with regard to the religious discourse: the question of the meaning of religious statements takes precedence over that of its truth. As Blackstone remarks, “The request for the meaning of a religious belief is logically prior to the question of accepting that belief on faith or to the question of whether that belief constitutes knowledge. This point the philosophical analysts have driven home with a vengeance”.⁴³ Here not even an appeal to faith can rescue religious statements. If the issue is whether assertions about God are meaningful, it will hardly do to reply that such assertions rest solely on the basis of faith in a special revelation. Obviously, not even faith can assert something as true which is in principle lacking in any genuine meaning.⁴⁴

Thus with the arrival of logical positivism on the philosophical scene, a radical version of religious agnosticism has been propounded. Until then, the theists, atheists and agnostics had shared a common assumption that the statements about God were meaningful; that the proposition “God exists” is in fact true or false, whatever be the difficulties in discovering which it is. This assumption is now denied, and the logical positivists suggest that statements about God are empty and devoid of meaning;

43. William T. Blackstone, *The Problem of Religious Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs. N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 2.

44. Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God and Other Essays* (London : SCM Press, 1963; 1967), p. 26.

indeed that they are not genuine statements at all. They do not *tell* us anything; they are not even false. Nor can one suspend judgment about them, as the agnostic does, because there is no intelligible proposition to suspend judgment about. Both theists and atheists are talking nonsense since the very question they are disputing about is a meaningless question.⁴⁵

It is Antony Flew who for the first time openly challenged the theists to establish whether religious statements are cognitively meaningful. He begins his attack with a haunting parable. In the parable, the believer, faced with the objections of the religious skeptic, goes on qualifying his statements about God's presence, until his hypothesis is "killed by inches, the death by a thousand qualifications".⁴⁶ Flew's fundamental question here is: "What would have to occur or to have occurred to constitute for you a disproof of the love of, or of the existence of, God?"⁴⁷ For it would seem that no conceivable event or series of events, not even utter human misery, as the case of an innocent child dying of cancer, would go against the propositions, such as "God exists" or "God loves us". In other words, "sophisticated religious people... tend to refuse to allow, not merely that anything actually does occur, but that anything conceivably could occur, which would count against their theological assertions and explanations".⁴⁸

45) H. H. Price, *Belief* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), pp. 455-56. See also Blackstone, *The Problem of Religious Knowledge*, p. 2. This position is called "ignosticism" which is a stronger rejection of theism than traditional agnosticism (Paul Kurz, "Commentary on Paul Edward's Paper: God-Talk", in Edward H. Madden et al. eds., *The Idea of God*, Springfield: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1968, p. 92). Another name for this view is "metatheological scepticism" (Raeburne S. Heimbeck, *Theology and Meaning*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969, p. 21).

46) Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification", in *Idem & Alasdair MacIntyre*, eds., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955; study edition, 1972), p. 97.

47) *Ibid.*, p. 99.

48) *Ibid.*, p. 106.

The logical principle operative here is that to assert that such and such is the case is necessarily equivalent to denying that such and such is not the case. For one way to find out the meaning of an assertion is to determine what would count against, or would be incompatible with, its truth. Anything which would count against the assertion must be part of, or whole of the meaning of the negation of that assertion. And to know the meaning of the negation of an assertion is to know the meaning of that assertion. If there is nothing which a putative assertion denies, then there is nothing which it asserts either. In other words, "an assertion, to be an assertion at all, must claim that things stand thus and thus; *and not otherwise*. Similarly an explanation, to be an explanation at all, must explain why this particular thing occurs; and not something else".⁴⁹

Antony Flew's challenge put the philosophers of religion in a very uncomfortable predicament. There were mainly two responses to this demand to justify the cognitive meaningfulness of religious discourse: descriptivist and non-descriptivist. Both these groups of philosophers unquestioningly accepted the legitimacy of the principles of logical positivism for cognitive meaning, namely, the principles of verification and falsification. Philosophers who belong to the descriptivist move, like Basil Mitchell, I. M. Crombie and John Hick hold that even after admitting the validity of the logical positivist principles for cognitivity, the assertional element of religious language can be salvaged.

We shall limit ourselves to the position advocated by John Hick. In order to defend the cognitive meaning of religious discourse, he elaborates the theory of "eschatological verification" which was suggested by Crombie.⁵⁰ This view, according

49) *Ibid.* Flew is fond of illustrating his point with a Spanish proverb: "'Take what you like', said God, 'take it and pay for it'", *God and Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), p. 29). For another excellent illustration of Flew's thesis, see Frederick Ferre, *Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967), pp. 335-50.

50) I. M. Crombie, "Theology and Falsification: Arising from the *University Discussion*", in Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, pp. 109-131.

to him, is based upon an actually operative religious concept of God. For, the Christian picture of the universe entails certain distinctive expectations concerning the future: the possibility of experiential confirmation is built into the Christian concept of God. This alleged future experience of God does suffice to render the choice between theism and atheism a real, and not merely an empty, choice. Thus the universe as envisaged by the theist differs as a totality from the universe as visualized by the atheist. The theist does and the atheist does not expect that when history is completed, it will be seen to have led to a particular state of affairs and to have fulfilled a specific purpose, namely, that of creating the children of God.

Now, since the idea of an eschatological verification of theism can make sense only if the logically prior idea of continued personal existence after death is intelligible, Hick sketches a doctrine of immortality. But mere personal survival of death alone would not verify theism, and demonstrate the existence of God. Hence Hick tries to imagine after-life experiences which would serve to verify theism. According to him, there are two possible developments of our experience such that if they occurred in conjunction with one another, they would assure us of the reality of God, as conceived by Christian faith. "These are, *first*, an experience of the fulfilment of God's purpose for ourselves, as this has been disclosed in the Christian revelation; in conjunction with, *second*, an experience of communion with God as he has revealed himself in the person of Christ."⁵¹

Hick explains these two developments as follows. The divine purpose for human life as depicted in the New Testament is the bringing of the human person to enjoy eternal life. The verification situation with regard to such a life is asymmetrical. On the one hand, so long as the divine purpose remains unfulfilled, we cannot know that it never will be fulfilled in the future; hence no final falsification is possible of the claim that this fulfilment will occur. On the other hand, if and when the

51) John Hick, "Theology and Verification", in Basil Mitchell, ed., *The Philosophy of Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 67, reprinted from *Theology Today* 17 (April 1960): 12-31.

divine purpose is fulfilled in our own experience, we must be able to recognize that fulfilment. The second feature that must be present in order to verify theism is an experience of communion with God as He has made Himself known in Christ. In Christianity, God is known as the "God of our Lord Jesus Christ". And it is God's union with man in Christ that makes possible man's recognition of the fulfilment of God's purpose as being the fulfilment of God's purpose for him. The presence of Christ in his kingdom marks this as being beyond doubt the kingdom of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵² Thus Hick claims to have established the factual character of religious statements so that they can be properly called cognitive.

While the descriptivist move affirmed that the factual character of religious language can be defended even after accepting the principles of logical positivism, the non-descriptivist philosophers held that on the basis of those principles, religious utterances are logically non-descriptive; and so they do not assert a state of affairs. Thus according to R. B. Braithwaite, for example, religious assertions have no irreducible, independent status; he reduces them to ethical discourse accompanied by certain stories. Basing on the principle of verification, he divides the propositions of language into three classes, namely, statements about particular matters of fact, scientific hypotheses, and propositions of logic and mathematics. Religious propositions cannot belong to the first category—statements about particular facts—for these latter have observable properties, whereas theological statements ascribe to God properties which are not observable. Nor can religious assertions be regarded as scientific explanations since in this case, they would have to be refutable by experience. But theological statements cannot be refuted by experience. Finally, religious utterances cannot be considered as logically necessary, and include them with the propositions of logic and mathematics. For these latter do not make any assertion about existence and hence theological statements also would have the consequence of making no assertion about existence.⁵³

52) *Ibid.*, pp. 67–70

53. R. B. Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), reprinted in Basil Mitchell, ed., *The Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 73–77.

Now, if religious utterances cannot be held to fall into any of these three classes, does this imply that they are meaningless? Braithwaite does not think so. According to him, religious statements are similar to moral statements since the latter too are unverifiable by standard methods. Still they have a use and meaning. The primary use of moral statements is that of "expressing the intention of the asserter to act in a particular sort of way specified in the assertion".⁵⁴ An utilitarian, for example, in asserting that he ought to act so as to maximize happiness, is thereby declaring his intention to act in accordance with the policy of utilitarianism; he is not asserting a proposition, but subscribing to a policy of action.

What is the use and meaning of religious statements? Braithwaite's contention is that the primary use of religious language is to announce allegiance to a set of moral principles:

Just as the meaning of a moral assertion is given by its use in expressing the asserter's intention to act, so far as in him lies, in accordance with the moral principle involved, so the meaning of a religious assertion is given by its use in expressing the asserter's intention to follow a specified policy of behaviour.⁵⁵

What is this "specified policy of behaviour" for the Christians? Basing his claim on 1 Cor. 13, Braithwaite regards "the typical meaning of the body of Christian assertions as being given by their proclaiming intentions to follow an agapeistic way of life,..."⁵⁶

Now, how can religious assertions be distinguished into those which are Christian, those which are Jewish, if their respective policies of behaviour turn out to be the same? According to Braithwaite, the real difference between an agapeistically policed Christian and an agapeistically policed Jew, is that "the intentions to pursue the behaviour policies, which may be the same for different religions are associated

54. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

with thinking of different *stories* (or sets of stories)".⁵⁷ By a story is meant "a proposition or set of propositions which are straightforwardly empirical propositions capable of empirical test and which are thought of by the religious man in connection with his resolution to follow the way of life advocated by his religion".⁵⁸ The language expressing the story can be understood verificationally in terms of human beings, for example, mythological beings who never existed, but who would have been empirically observable if they existed. But one need not believe in the truth of the story. Christian stories include historical statements about the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, and stories about the beginning of the world and of the Last Judgment. Thus Braithwaite gives a non-cognitive interpretation of religious statements; that is, in terms of moral assertions which are accompanied by stories.

What is impressive about Antony Flew's objection against religious discourse is its cognitive thrust. He presupposes that religious statements are *assertions* which do describe a state of affairs: "Religious utterances may indeed express false or even bogus assertions: but I simply do not believe that they are not both intended and interpreted to be or at any rate to presuppose assertions, at least in the context of religious practice ..."⁵⁹ Again Flew is emphatic that religious utterances are not expressions of emotions or wishes: "... those who intend or interpret such utterances as crypto-commands, expressions of wishes, disguised ejaculations, concealed ethics, or as anything else but assertions, are unlikely to succeed in making them either properly orthodox or practically effective."⁶⁰ What puzzled Flew was the theist's "doublethink" attitude which consists in holding that religious statements are assertions, but at the same time declining to submit to the test for genuine assertions. Hick too stresses the fact that religious propositions have a cognitive meaning. Though he has invented odd theories to establish his point, he is emphatic that religious language has an assertional character. Of course, Braithwaite does not admit that the language of religion has a cognitive meaning, and hence he gives it a non-cognitive interpretation.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Flew, "Theology and Falsification", p. 108.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

In fact many contemporary philosophers of the linguistic tradition have highlighted the importance of the cognitive dimension of religious language in general, and of Christian discourse in particular. Van der Veken affirms the centrality of the truth-claims in religion as follows: "... a religion that gives up saying something ultimate about human existence and about 'how all things hold together' reduces itself to a mere subjectivistic way of looking at man and his destiny in an unfathomable universe".⁶¹ Emmet makes an almost identical point when she says: "But here, if anywhere, this question [of cognitivity] cannot be avoided, since religion loses its nerve when it ceases to believe that it expresses in some way truth about our relation to a reality beyond ourselves which ultimately concerns us".⁶² Similarly in McGregor's opinion, "... there is a cognitive element in religion; that is, when religion lacks that element it lacks what gives it life. Lively religion always purports, explicitly or otherwise, to put us in the way of 'knowing God'".⁶³ Though the above-quoted authors have recourse to different methods and techniques in order to establish that religions make truth-claims, there is no doubt in their minds that religions do claim to tell us how things are.

Furthermore, there is a unanimity of views among many contemporary authors regarding the central place of the cognitive element in Christianity in particular. Thus according to Laura, "In depriving Christianity of its capacity to make truth claims, one relinquishes so much of what is of fundamental importance that what remains can hardly be said to be Christianity".⁶⁴ McPherson expresses a similar opinion: "... it is hard

61. Jan Van der Veken, "Can the True God be the God of One Book?: The Particularity of Religion and the Universality of Reason", in J. Coppens, ed., *La Notion Biblique de Dieu: Le Dieu de Bible et le Dieu des Philosophes* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1978), p. 432.

62. Dorothy Emmet, *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* (London: Macmillan, 1945; 1966), p. 4.

63. Geddes MacGregor, *Philosophical Issues in Religious Thought*, Boston: Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 447.

64. Ronald S. Laura, "Some Elucidations and Cognitivity Problems of Religious Discourse", *Thomist* 36 (October 1972): 605-606.

to accept that a religion in which it did not matter very much what truth-claims a person made could properly be called Christianity".⁶⁵ Though himself a religious skeptic, Nielsen thinks that the propositional element is essential to Christian beliefs: "If utterances such as 'There exists a creator of the heavens and the earth' are not taken by believers to be factual assertions... theistic religious talk and hence Christianity itself would lose the character it has".⁶⁶ In short, Christianity and the other great religions of the world do make claims to truth. Religious assertions purport to tell us how things are. Truth-claims are of essence to religion so that a religion which repudiates or neglects them is not worthy of that name.

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We shall conclude these reflections on the importance of semantics and cognitive dimension in religious discourse and theology. We have criticized certain trends in contemporary theology, which concern themselves exclusively with the phenomenological meaningfulness and linguistic meaning of religious statements. But this does not mean that as methods of investigation, phenomenology and linguistic analysis are irrelevant to theological enterprise. On the contrary, phenomenological method is a very useful tool for discovering the meaningfulness of religious language by relating it to those aspects of human experience which it thematizes and conceptualizes, and where it communicates and is thus meaningful. Similarly, linguistic analysis is a valuable method for clarifying the concepts and usages of religious language. What has been criticized here is the methodology of certain theologians who limit themselves exclusively to the phenomenological and linguistic aspects of religious statements to the detriment of their cognitive dimension. What

65. Thomas McPherson, *Philosophy and Religious Belief* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1974), p. 35.

66. Kai Nielsen, "Eschatological Verification", in G. L. Abernethy and T. A. Langford, eds., *Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 289. For similar remarks, see also H. D. Lewis, *Our Experience of God* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959; Fontana edition, 1974), p. 61; Eugene Peters, *The Creative Advance* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1966), p. 27; Ferré *Basic Modern philosophy of Religion*, p. 86.

is worse, some reduce the assertional aspect of religious utterances to their phenomenological meaningfulness or linguistic meaning, thus refusing to grant an irreducible, independent status to the propositional factor.

None of the foregoing reflections implies that philosophical theologians should be let loose to build castles in the air, which have no relation to the individual or communal experience of religious believers. A purely axiomatic and deductive philosophical theology is as deficient and unsuitable as a theological method that is content with the description of the meaningfulness of Christian message or with the clarification of the rules and concepts of the language of Christian believers. A philosophical theology must embrace both the concrete and the abstract. It must start with experience taken in the broadest sense of the term to include not only anthropological experience—of human subjectivity—but also cosmological experience—of objective nature, and of course the experience of the particular religious tradition. But it must go beyond experience towards systematization. For, as Kant has rightly observed, experience without categories is blind, and categories without experience are empty. Moreover, the philosophical theologian must from time to time return to the experience of the individual believer and of the worshipping community. Whitehead's remark about the method in metaphysics is *mutatis mutandis* applicable in this context: "The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation".⁶⁷ The cognitive element of religious discourse can be salvaged only in such a methodology which involves "imaginative generalization" and "rational interpretation".

If this conclusion is correct, this would mean a re-introduction of natural theology in the traditional sense on the theological scene. For, it was precisely such rational argumentation and systematization which were the characteristic methods of traditional natural theology. Moreover, this would imply a

67. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929; Free Press edition, 1969), p. 7.

renewed faith in the capacity of reason for knowing reality. One of the side effects of existentialism and positivism was a radical shrinking of the role of reason both in philosophy and theology.⁶⁸ Hence in the present anti-metaphysical and anti-dogmatic mood of much of contemporary philosophy and theology, even the mention of argumentation and rationality in religion and theology may be a scandal, if not an outright heresy. This is in fact another symptom of the non-cognitive bias prevalent in these disciplines. But one of the lessons to be learnt from the history of philosophy and theology is that one can only postpone the issue and moment of propositional truth; one cannot suppress it. Whitehead's observation about importance is *mutatis mutandis* applicable here: "Expel it with a pitchfork, and it ever returns".⁶⁹

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68. It is heartening to see theologians making use of metaphysical categories for explaining theological problems. Thus, for example, Koothottil adopts Whiteheadian concepts for illuminating the question of the immortality of human person. (Abraham Koothottil, "Life 'After' Death: Individual or Universal Communion?", *Jeevadhara* 55 (Jan. - Feb. 1980): 63-88.

69. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1938: Free Press edition, 1968), p. 8.

Sign of Contradiction – a critique of religion and its relation to society

Elsewhere¹ I have indicated the idea of the religious principle by which is meant the primordial relationship between man and Transcendence. The religious principle responds to man's innermost aspirations and gives explanations of the meaning of life. Asking about man's origin and end, religion posits itself as related to man and his relationship to society in which human life unfolds itself. This aspiration in man to transcend life and to attain the ultimate core of life points towards the so-called *religious principle*.²

Religion with its external garb is essentially related to society. Religious forces influence social forces and social forces condition religious forces. The power and structure in society influence the needs and values of religion. In this process religion inevitably becomes the organized religion. In other words, the religious principle tends to become the *organized religious principle*. Organized religious principle acquires power. Also the power inherent in the reality principle finds support from and sustains in the organized religious principle. Religious principle then becomes a legitimation of the existing power structure. The organized religious principle thus becomes the *established religious principle*. The established reality principle has historically conditioned the existence and the legitimation of the established

1. *Jeevadhara* 58 (1980), p. 302 ff.

2. I have chosen the more general phrase 'religious principle' in preference to that of 'Christianity', 'Buddhism', 'Hinduism' or 'Islam', because the ideas underlined in this critique of religion are not delimited to a particular religion, but the religion as such, i. e., the very core of what makes a religion religion: its Transcendence, though a greater part of ideas exposed here touches directly the established religious principle embodied in the Christian religion.

religious principle. In other words, religious principle adjusts itself to the established values of the existing social order.

Freud and Marcuse have shown in their analyses of civilization that repression inherent in culture and civilization has its roots in scarcity (*Ananke*).³ Then it is possible to assert that individual in his hard struggle for existence learns restraints and renunciation, and through them, renunciation of *this world*, i. e. the reality principle. Consequently, he seeks power and strength from the *other world*. This however is being done at the cost of his power and strength in this world. The established religious principle in this respect comes to his rescue by teaching him to see this world as illusion (*Maya*). Thus the individual is forced to look at the established reality principle as the *maya reality principle*. Historically speaking, it is apt to say that the established religious principle maintains its stand more in the *maya reality principle* (*maya principle*, to be short) than in the performance principle.⁴ The established religious principle which seems to flourish in the *maya principle* becomes the *maya religious principle*. The *maya religious principle* overemphasizes the other-worldly state of affairs: *fuga mundi* (flight from this world), forgets conveniently the world and its requirements, and perpetuates ritualism, formalism, externalism and pietism.

The aim of this article is to take a steady look at the situation of the established religious principle in this world. Numerically speaking, established religious principle represents a considerable group of people throughout world. It is present in the midst of so many sectors of society, with its message of hope and salvation. Surely it is able to excite the aspiration of mankind for hope and salvation, but it is hardly doing that. The time has come to ask ourselves whether this is due to the unsuitability of the religious principle and its inherent Transcendence or to the timidity of those who adhere to this religious principle.

The established religious principle has built in itself an established resistance to excellence and expansion of the authentic

3. Cf. T. Vellilamthadam, *Tomorrow's Society. Marcuse and Freud on civilization* (Kottayam: 1978), p. 53.

4. For the concept of performance principle, see *ibid.*, p. 54.

Transcendence. The members of the established religious principle do not only not inspire the unity and fellowship in mankind but also prevent them from growing up.

It is possible to note a deep sense of the loss of Transcendence. This appears in various ways: a worship without a sense of social conscience, an other-worldly doctrine without a sense of the human, and an emptiness of the authentic values and ethical principles. Again, there is a loss of the Transcendence in the established religious principle as there is a lack of the consciousness of the sinful situation, a negligence of serious metanoia, a failure to move together in mutual understanding and support, and mutual commitments to a better world, a loss of concern for the wretched of the earth — the harijans, the parias, the tribals, the adivasis, the pulayas, the Mundas, the Oraons, the slum-dwellers, the rikshaw-wallahs, the fishermen, the farmers, the unemployed. Furthermore, the established religious principle too often seems to serve the complacent affluent ideologies. This state of affairs has long history. Sometimes the established religious principle has been the victim of the performance principle and maya principle. Sometimes it has been an accomplice with them in distorting the sense of the Transcendence, the sense of the Holy. In both cases it has become a kind of carousel. There is therefore the need for the recovery of the Transcendence.

Teilhard de Chardin has seen the presence of the maya religious principle in Christianity when he narrates that "Christianity has become, in human term, antipathetic. In earlier times it was feared or persecuted as being a power. Today, it is avoided, or kept at a distance, as a burden or encumbrance. That is the factual situation. It would be idle to explain this state of affairs as the result of ignorance or misrepresentation, for both those are effects rather than causes. The truth is that if Christianity has lost its attraction today, it is by no means because it is too difficult and too elevated (as its defenders pretend to believe) but for the contrary reason: in the form in which Christianity is generally presented today, its ideal is neither pure enough nor elevated enough. To our minds, the Christian religion seems narrow; and our hearts tell us that we cannot breathe in its atmosphere. And the reason for this is

precisely that Christianity has not yet allowed room for — gives, indeed, even the impression of being hostile to — the aspirations of the sense of man.”⁵

Organized maya religious principle is shaped by human arrangements and once these human arrangements misrepresent human beings, they must be rejected. It is through the awareness of the institutions which debase human dignity that the authentic religious principle can be re-created. This calls for the analysis of the main characteristics of the established maya religious principle.

1. Ritualism

Maya religious principle leads inevitably to uncommitted and meaningless rituals. “There is no conviction in the old priests’ songs; there is only showmanship. No one in the Kingdom is convinced that the gods have life in them. The weak observe the rituals—take their hats off, put them on again, raise their arms, moan, intone, press their palms together—but no one harbors unreasonable expectations”.⁶ Theology is to be blamed for this: “Theology does not thrive in the world of action and reaction, change: it grows on calm, like the scum on a stagnant pool”⁷, and “the Church, drifting in a backwater of abstract theology, of a sacramentalism whose standard is quantity rather than quality, of over-refined piety, has lost contact with the real. The guidance provided by the clergy, and the interest of the faithful, are gradually being confined to a little artificial world of ritualism, of religious practices, of pious extravagancies, which completely cut off from the true current of reality. The Eucharist, in particular, is tending to become a sort of object whose validity rests entirely in itself, and which absorbs religi-

5. P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Toward the Future*, London: 1975, p. 26.

6. J. Gardner, *Grendel* (New York: 1972), p. 111 quoted in R. A. Duffy, “Unreasonable Expectations”, in L. Salm (ed.), *Proceedings of the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention*, vol. 34 (Atlanta: 1980), p. 1.

7. *Ibid.*

ous activity instead of making it work as a leaven for the salvation of everything in the universe".⁸

Why did the sacraments not effect the praxis of the Church? How did theology make development of rituals which hindered the Christian to commit himself socially and individually to Gospel imperatives? Whatever be the case, ritualism has driven the people away from the Church. "The people, despite their religious feeling, feel uncomfortable and even out of place in the Church. The Church is confronted with a popular Christianity permanently demonstrating its suspicion of the official rules and practices of the Church; the people have their children baptized and wish their dead to have a Christian burial, but they do not go to mass and are reluctant to listen to any message from the Church; they see the Church as the administrative arm of 'religion', to which respect must be paid, but they do not feel they belong to it and they understand little of official religious teaching".⁹

2. Rigorism

Maya religious principle is based on an impersonal order which fosters ecclesiastical functioning rather than ecclesial witness. The impersonal order is based on an I-It rather than an I-Thou relationship.¹⁰ In an impersonal order it is the legal rigorism that prevails in the most important pastoral issues, especially those relating to sexual and family relationships.¹¹ "The reason for the Church's loss of appeal is not that it demands too much but that in fact it offers too little challenge or does not present its demands clearly enough as priorities

8. Teilhard de Chardin, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

9. F. Castillo, "Christianity. Bourgeois Religion or Religion of the People?", in J. B. Metz (ed.), *Christianity and the Bourgeoisie* (New York: 1979), p. 57.

10. For Martin Buber's distinction between I-Thou and I-It relationships, see J. Mundackal, "Dialogical Man. Buber on human relations", in T. Vellilamthadom (ed.), *Despair, Hope and Bliss* (Kottayam: Oriental Institute Publications, 1980) pp. 57-84.

11. Cf. J. Arakkal, "Dialectics of Belief and Life", *Jeevadhara* 31 (1976), p. 67 ff.

of the Gospel itself. If the Church were more radical in the Gospel sense it would probably not need to be so 'rigorous' in the legal sense. Rigorism springs from fear..."¹². The rigorism is no help to the average common man in the parish. It is the parish which has to bear the full weight of this contradiction. The rigorism only covers up the gap between what is preached and what is lived. The maya virtues of fear, resignation, inactivity, scrupulosity, subordination, submission and obedience crush the messianic virtues of straightforwardness, trust, love, cooperation and loyalty.

3. Privatization of virtues

In maya religious principle religious and ethical behaviour has become privatized. The realms of business, politics, science and technology are relegated to the public sphere and are consequently divorced from the sphere of transcendence. The Christian virtues of neighbourly love, service and justice are located in the private sphere and can consequently work only in the private world of family and restricted closed groups. In the public world these virtues have absolutely no place.

4. Emphasis on personal salvation

The salvation is narrowed down to the personal realm: "Here Jesus is seen as the saviour who rescues us one by one from the catastrophe of history. Through faith, a person is related to God, is healed, restored, brought into holiness and saved for eternal life. This approach can lead to such a concentration of the individual that life after death becomes the entire religious preoccupation. Earthly life is here a testing ground where individuals demonstrate their fidelity to God and then graduate to the realm of heaven. Man's historical existence and mission are wholly relativized. While such a view of grace and salvation is basically at odds with the genius of Catholicism, there are signs that such ideas pervade even Catholic Piety".¹³

12. J. B. Metz, "Messianic or Bourgeois Religion?", in J. B. Metz (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

13. G. Baum, "Middle class religion in America", in J. B. Metz (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 20.

5. Masochism

There is also the presence of masochistic element which makes the individual blame himself for failures. "In religion this trend shapes a particular view of sin and guilt. God becomes here the great accuser. We are presented with rules and high ideals and asked to do well and move forward. If we live up to the divine expectation, we are rewarded, but if we fail, we live in guilt waiting for the divine punishment. There is no awareness here that the order in which we live is sinful and that the injustices built into society damage us and disable us, and that therefore failure in our personal lives is a symptom of the world's sin. The highly private notion of sin exempts the institutions from critical examination. In this piety what counts is to try hard. And if we fail to try hard, then we are no good, then we are guilty and hate ourselves".¹⁴ Maya religious principle is immersed in the injustices and socio-political mechanisms that make common people victims of power struggle and established violence. By preaching resignation, it sanctions the established reality principle and its immorality and makes people blind to the existing contradictions.

6. Optimism

There is an over-simplified optimism in the sense that the maya religious principle overlooks the enormous gaps between people. It thinks that the Christian message has the same meaning for all, beyond the differences of class and caste. Consequently, sermons and advices are given as if all belonged to one sector of society. "To respond to world hunger a preacher will ask people to opt for a more modest life and a simpler diet without any awareness that some families in the congregation are unable to feed their children properly. Church leaders use the word 'materialistic' in a pejorative sense as if they are thinking of the well-to-do who long for a sail boat or a house in the country; if they thought of parents who long for money so that their children can have their teeth cared for or get a better education, churchmen would not use pejorative language to describe the desire for greater income".¹⁵ Communism and leftist parties are

14. *Ibid.*; also J. Arakkal, *art. cit.* p. 65.

15. *Ibid.*

labelled as 'diabolic' and churchmen are often inclined to make irresponsible and sweeping generalizations during elections, wholly ignoring the economic set up, power struggle, political ideologies and political alignments of parties in the country.¹⁶

7. Ignorance of social complexity

The maya religious principle disguises the real conflicts in the society and the unequal distribution of wealth and power. It pretends then to assume that love can unite all people in a given situation. It hopes thus to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, between the people in the maya principle and those in the performance principle through mere preaching of love and fraternity. It thinks naively that the world's problems could be overcome, if all people became more generous, and helped each other.

8. Anti-intellectual trend

Since the maya religious principle is based on the belief of the illusion of the reality principle, it lives in a world of innocence in which faith tries not only to absorb reason but also to eclipse it totally. It mistrusts the use of reason. The use of reason is seen as a danger to the established maya religious principle. As a consequence, it is ready to exalt brick and to neglect brain. It systematically fights against the use of brain. Furthermore, it has constructed an intellectual cloister that walled out the complexity and confusion of modern life. It prefers tranquillity, silence, contemplation and security to noise, crowd, vulnerability, action, and insecurity of modern social set up. It wants its members to learn more and to be erudite. But the learning process is limited to the quantitative accumulation of knowledge and not to the conscious use of the faculty of reasoning, which is meant to interpret the reality and its contradictions.

9. Sadism

There is also the predominance of sadistic elements in the maya religious principle. They are seen in the theology of the

16. With regard to the situation in Kerala, see M. Kanjirathinkal, "Christian Participation in Politics", *Jeevadhara* 31 (1976), pp. 125-47.

Cross, of Good Friday devotion, liturgy as a pathetic show, the canonical scrupulosity and timidity. It is manifested in the severe unchristian regulations in the matter of faith and morality, making Christianity apt only for the rude and rough illiterate village people. Sadistic elements are further expressed in the peculiar attitude towards the weak and the women.

Conclusion

The above-mentioned characteristics are only a few among many others, but they are able to shed light on the distortion of the religious principle. A religion whose Master has called His disciples friends has been transformed into an unhappy gathering in which everyone feels he is an enemy of everybody else. It has become a stagnant pool in which the Transcendence ceased to flow. When human relations in a given religious principle is jeopardized, it must be called into question. An established religious principle has no right to existence if it does not foster authentic human relations among its members. This calls for constant re-moulding of the established religious principle so that it may conform to the true Transcendence. Let me quote Teilhard de Chardin: "The proper mark of a true religion should be to spread like water or fire irresistibly".¹⁷

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17. P. Teilhard de Chardin, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

Tracks to - - - God !

1. Tracks? Why not proof ?

Can the existence of God be proved ?

This is a question that continually and frequently re-emerges.

In earlier times theologians, philosophers and Christians in general would have answered 'yes'. Paul, in the Letter to the Romans, says that even pagans could have known the true God: 'For what could be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made' (Rom. 1:19 - 20).

In the Old Testament too God's existence is, as it were, taken for granted. God performs miracles in nature and among His people as Lord of creation and of history.

The First Vatican Council explicitly states that with the help of reason it can be shown that God exists.

In the course of time many 'proofs for the existence of God' have been developed: just think of the ontological argument of Anselm (which demonstrates that a being 'greater than which nothing can be thought' must also necessarily exist), the five ways of St. Thomas, the argument from the order in nature, the moral argument and so on.

Yet it seems that all these proofs only convince those who are already convinced. What is the reason for this? Have you ever noticed that the opposite is also true? However many the objections that have been brought up against the existence of God, belief in God is still holding its place remarkably well in our time. Most people do in fact believe that there is a mystery to be perceived behind things.

What then is the status of these 'proofs for the existence of God'? First of all, our time does not have much liking for 'proofs', for the word 'proof' gives the impression of wanting to grasp hold of God, of wanting to force others to believe by reducing God to the result of an arithmetical operation.

We can dig still deeper. We have then to reflect on the nature itself of a proof. To prove a thing means to trace it back to something that is more certain than what has to be proved, something that we already know. Well, when it comes to the ultimate and most fundamental truths a proof in the strict sense is really impossible. Can I in fact know anything with my intellect? Do my senses reach out to a world that really exists? Am I not in a dream? These are questions that cannot be answered with the help of a proof. We cannot trace them back to anything more fundamental.

If I cannot know anything with my intellect, how then can I know anything at all?

If my senses deceive me, how can I gain any knowledge of the sensible world around me? Aristotle maintained that it is a sign of understanding to recognize that not everything is to be proved. The first principles of thought, for example, cannot be traced back to anything else.

In a certain sense this is also the case with the God-question. Nothing is more fundamental than 'the Beginning and the End of all things'. To what could an assertion about the Beginning and the End of all still be traced back?

This does not mean to say, however, that you are not able to give any reasons for accepting the existence of God. For, in the Beginning and the End of all, many of the realities around us or certain aspects of our own lives are better and more immediately known to us. Therefore, in relation to accepting God, we can also mount from what is better known to what is less immediately known. No one less than Hegel found the rejection of the proofs for the existence of God 'the prejudice of a certain education'. Because of the special nature of the search for God as Heart and Core of all reality, we would prefer to speak of indicators, ways, tracks to God.

2. The God-problem is not a separate problem

It is illusory to think that believers and unbelievers are really in agreement on most points but that, on top of everything else, believers think that a heavenly being called 'God' exists. In the God-problem it is a matter of how ultimately, in the last resort, we conceive reality as a whole. Are we ultimately the outcome and plaything of blind forces? Or is there a loving intention behind our lives? This is what it's about. The God-question is then a question that you cannot resolve in a totally detached way. It has to do with yourself, with your fellow human beings, with your destiny. How do you see yourself? Do you believe in meaning, in the good, in the future? This is the subject-matter when we speak of 'God'. 'Life is a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved': these words are found on a poster I like very much. For this reason too we will not get very far with proofs. For no one can compel another to see Reality (both the Whole and one's own place in it) in a particular way.

This personal involvement entails that the same elements in our experience will not appeal to everyone; not everyone follows the same trail, nor should he. There are many experiences in which something of the ultimate Mystery of all things shines through, but, taken in itself, no single experience is fitted to or accessible to everybody. Each one has to follow his own path and, in his own inestrageable way, come to terms with the question of the meaning of his existence as a whole. Of course this does not mean that believing or not believing is a completely private matter which cannot be discussed with anyone else. On the contrary, from your childhood on you receive the most basic attitudes and insights in the environment in which you are brought up and in which you learn to live. As an adult, of course, you have to assess these received attitudes and convictions with a critical eye and to take a personal stand with regard to them. The main reason many of us believe in God is that we were brought up at home to do so. There is nothing wrong with this, so long as we haven't failed to move beyond that point.

You can't be reckless in taking up a position on the question whether to believe in God or not; it is too fundamental

a matter for that. In this field you do not change your mind without very weighty reasons and deep experiences. This also explains why proofs will not often actually 'convert' someone and why purely intellectual difficulties lead (or should lead) rather to a purging of faith than to a falling away from faith.

3. Reasons for believing in God

In what follows I shall attempt to marshal some of the experiences, points of contact and reasons that point to belief in God. It is very important not to see them as arguments but to allow oneself to be addressed by them. Then sometimes the light dawns: there must indeed be something (or Someone). It cannot be entirely a matter of chance. It has been put like this: 'there are too many things that point to Him. Life in all its aspects is too beautiful'. Wonder at ordinary realities is for modern man a more evident way to God than recognizing Him in the extraordinary. A primitive mentality finds God more easily in the spectacular, the amazing, the extraordinary. We have learnt not to be astonished any more by thunder and lightning, the passing of the seasons, the birth of new life. Or have we? Certainly even for modern man something of the awe-inspiring Mystery of Creation can sometimes shine through in ordinary, everyday realities. Creation is itself a religious word. It expresses the deep consciousness of the person who arrives at the discovery that everything does not 'just simply' exist. Great saints, such as Francis of Assisi in his *Sun Canticle*, were capable of a certain intimacy with the Universe, with brother Sun and sister Moon. These were not gods for Francis, but, as for the psalmist, they sang the praise of the Supreme God.

The admirable order in nature has struck people of all times. Some are moved by the steady regularity of the course of the stars, others are more impressed by the unbelievable complexity of a cell or of a blade of grass. Since human beings learnt in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to look more attentively at nature the world has been full of surprises. They discovered everywhere the hand of the all-wise, almighty Planner of the Universe. A man like Voltaire, who raged against 'superstition', never for a moment doubted the existence of 'le Dieu Horloge', God as the Watch-maker. Voltaire couldn't imagine a watch

without a watch-maker nor a world without God. 'If God did not exist, we would have to invent him', said Voltaire, 'but all of nature calls out to us that he does exist'. This argument from the order of nature has always convinced many people, both in former times and even still. Why has it then been subjected to such strong criticism by scientists and philosophers?

The scientist looks for measureable connections between facts. He wants to track down how factor A causes result B. The scheme of reasoning he follows is: if A, then B. Well, God is never a factor along with other factors, never an element alongside other elements. A scientist is obliged by his profession and by his method to seek relation between facts on the level of the empirical and the verifiable. Life is for him a question of DNA and chromosomes, of information and highly complex chemical relations. Cosmology explains the origin of the universe (at any rate the solar systems known to us) as the explosion of a compact quantity of matter (the big-bang theory). Therefore some scientists have quite rightly but rather sharply stated: whatever explanation I find, I refuse to call it God. Yet there are many scientists who are conscious that there is more to the matter than that. What in the last resort makes it possible that the concerted action of such a vast number of factors enables a universe to come about and not confused chaos? Here we touch on other problems which are no longer scientific. Einstein, Pasteur, Teilhard de Chardin and many others were at the same time great scientists and convinced believers. The time of seeming opposition between science and belief in God has, I think, now definitely passed. The fact that the sciences had to discover, and in part to gain control of, their own methods of explanation led to certain inevitable tensions. Now, however, it seems that the dialogue between science and belief has entered a new phase. Scholars themselves are beginning to see that there are still innumerable questions which are above and beyond the sciences. You can hear it said to-day: 'I believe because I am a scientist'. This means that something new is happening. Not that I have found God in the laboratory (for He is not to be found there, at least not any more than elsewhere), but because I realize that innumerable problems arise on a level of discourse which is in principle quite different to that on which the sciences operate. In this respect the book of Raymond Ruyer (*La Gnose*

de Princeton. Des savants a la recherche d'une religion, Fayard, 1974; later issued in a pocket edition) is quite remarkable. The Frenchman Ruyer reports on a new way of thinking that has been developed by top scientists in Pasadena and Princeton, in the United States. From their science they have developed a cosmology which displays a remarkable degree of resemblance with the philosophy of Whitehead and with some features of the thought of Teilhard de Chardin. That such a book was possible (and that in France at least it is selling like hot cakes) indicates that the science-religion dialogue has not lost its relevance.

Philosophers and theologians too have come up with objections to the proof for the existence of God from the order in nature. Why is this? The philosopher's objection will rather be: if you bring God down to the level of being an explanatory factor in the world, then you have again reduced God to a being alongside other beings, to a being ('Seinde') amongst other beings. And such is, according to Heidegger, the original sin of Western metaphysics. Theologians will come up with the following objections: if you simply call the World-intellect or Principle of order (which there has to be in any case) God, haven't you then lost sight of the living God of faith? Isn't that God in the first place much more the God of His people and the Lord of history than the designer of nature? Theologians reproach Thomas not with having accepted a principle of order (or of movement), but with having too quickly added: and everyone calls that principle God ('quod omnes dicunt Deum'). Perhaps one should be more hesitant to come out with the religious and sublime name of God. Perhaps God as an explanatory principle is always but an idol. Protestant authors especially are very wont to reject any attempt to get to know God by a way other than that which He himself has chosen, that is, through His revelatory Word.

Yet I am of the opinion that the true God who speaks in the Bible cannot be any other than He who really allows Himself to be known by everyone in nature, in the world, in people. It is true that a consideration of nature or of order does not bring us to know a great deal about God personally; He seems then only an inaccessible Principle, a kind of World-

spirit. We are then a long way from the familiar 'Abba' of the New Testament. But still. Isn't God so great that in any case you cannot take hold of Him in any single approach?

Perhaps the time has come to say something about the level on which the properly philosophical God-question is posed. The real question is: why is there something and not nothing?

This is a question that no thinking person can avoid. It is of course as valid for atheists as for believers. Some are of the opinion that human reason cannot pose such questions for itself, or that anyway it cannot answer them. Such a standpoint is called 'agnosticism'.

Yet this question comes up over and over again. There is Reality in any case. The question is then: how are we to conceive of the one Reality that shows itself in all realities? What is the best name we can use to speak of the whole? Matter? Spirit? Matter and Spirit? Reality? God? No: there are no easy answers. It will be a matter of thinking together Reality and realities, the finite and the infinite, in such a way that they are neither identified with nor completely separated from each other. In our time we feel the need of thinking of the whole in a new manner.

We need a philosophical system that is both adopted to the insights of the modern natural sciences and open enough to allow the religious dimension take its rightful place. The world-view of the Middle Ages had the advantage of being a total system. But for many reasons it cracked at the seams. There is clearly need for a new metaphysics. My own opinion is that the process-philosophy of Whitehead and Hartshorne is rich in promise.

4. Where the tracks to God are to be found

I can well understand that believers especially may be growing impatient with this talk of the distant God of the philosophers? Don't we find God rather in the experience of the good, in the face of the other? I agree, but I thought it good first to speak of the other, less anthropological and less personal ways of approach. But let us now turn to those places where our contemporaries more easily recognize traces of God.

'God for me is the one through whom my life receives its ultimate, final and *deepest meaning*. The Alpha and Omega of my life.' 'He made my life worth living.' 'The necessity of giving meaning to life.' These are just a few examples from the 'reasons for believing in God' which those following my course noted on reference cards. People are seeking happiness, and are experiencing it too. Might that not just be an illusion? Man is a being that looks for meaning. In spite of everything he accepts existence. Erikson speaks of basic trust. Indeed, in spite of everything human beings still find existence worthwhile. Everyone knows that this is not a general rule. Sometimes people's doubts about meaning can go very deep. There are people who really no longer have any confidence in life. And yet, the flame of hope flickers again and again, a smile, a kind word. Life goes on.

Forces greater than ourselves are at work in this universe. Sometimes it is given to us to recognize them. Then we give them a name. Then we reach for the time-honoured word: God.

Gratitude and desperation sometimes follow close on the heels of each other. Just read a couple of psalms. You will see that the psalmist truly knows that God is not always all that close. But yet he keeps praying, and that does not seem to be wishful thinking, an illusion. On the contrary, then for the first time the searching, suffering, despairing, praying person seems to be standing on firm ground again. This happens when he realizes and trustfully recognizes that not he but God is the Lord, the Rock, the Ground of trust. Here something of the inner logic of the affirmation of God becomes clear. Believing in God is always believing *in spite of* the suffering, in spite of the meaninglessness that is apparent. Believing is not just saying: we live in the best conceivable world. That is fatalism, determinism. Believing in God is risking that trust is *still* justified, despite everything. Believing is taking a chance that there is Someone stronger than suffering, than transitoriness, than death; and that Someone is gracious towards us, and that our name is written in the palm of His hand.

'When people are good and even offer their whole lives for one another, then I feel Him at work.' 'In the measure love between people increases God too becomes more visible.' 'God? Someone whom we meet *in* our fellow human beings.' Solidarity with other people is for our time a privileged place for finding God. That does not mean that we can and may reduce religion to solidarity with other people. 'So long as we are kind to one another.' Yet it is true that in the other person a mystery is proclaimed which is greater than ourselves. The other is not just another member of the human race, someone who shares the same destiny as ourselves. The other person possesses that marvellous characteristic of affirming us so that we may be as we are, with our flaws and less attractive side. 'You don't have to be perfect for me!' is an aphorism (of the Bond-zonder-naam) which young people find arresting. When we are accepted by the other person, something of His acceptance breaks through, He who transcends both myself and the other person. My existence as such seems worthwhile to me if I *may* be there. Then I reach spontaneously for words that express thankfulness, gratitude. 'It'-words are not up to this, so I venture the magic word 'You'!

'The face of the other points out my obligations to me and judges me', according to the French philosopher, Levinas. In the *face of the other* the ethical demand comes to meet me. What I do with respect to the other is not a matter of indifference. When I fail to respect his humanity, I kill my own too. Justice must in every instance be done. Here too the other is the bearer of a demand which transcends us both. It is not the other person who is asking for my recognition (the starving child in the Sahel does not even know me), but the Other. The depth dimension of solidarity with other people is for many Christians an easy, really obvious way to God. This sometimes leads to the inclination to identify religion with the struggle for justice. The different theologies of liberation are associated with this way to God. It would be a pity, however, if a one-sided emphasis on an all-important aspect of Christianity in our time were to have as a consequence another one-sided emphasis on the vertical dimension. You ought not set up an opposition between our orientation to God and our orientation

to other human beings. Nor are these two orientations related to each other as the beams of a cross. Rather our Lord wishes to be served in the least of His. 'You have done it to me': this is what those who have fed the hungry and who have defended the rights of the downtrodden will hear.

The depth dimension of one's own inwardness is also a place where God is found. He is more myself than I myself am: 'Deus intimior intimo meo' (Augustine). 'There exists a point where I can encounter God in a real and empirical contact with His infinite reality, and that is where my uncertain existence depends on His love. There is in me a nucleus of existence where I am held in being by my Creator' (Thomas Merton).

Mysticism is now the 'in' thing. What we are now witnessing is a democratizing of mysticism. The danger of superficiality looms. Still it is a boon that people again have an ear for the voices of silence, and for the lingering of the soul with its Origin. Perhaps there is no better place of getting to know God Himself than in mystical prayer. I would like to point out the exceptional importance of disinterested praise in order to get to know God. Recently I heard of a request someone had made during a charismatic retreat: who will come with me to praise God in simplicity, without ulterior motives, just to allow God be God? These were moments of intense prayer during which those present experienced something of what touched the psalmists and religious people of all times in their deepest being.

There are still many other tracks to be mentioned: the human search for truth, conscience, the deposit of religious experiences in holy books. Yes, revelation. God can let Himself be known in the specific history of a specific people better than elsewhere. He can create a people for Himself. He can let Himself be fully known as He is in the Son, the image of His invisible being....

5. What is then the meaning of : tracks to - - - 'God'!

What do we mean by that time-honoured word?

We have already spoken of the meaning of tracks. They are signs that God has come this way. No one of these indicators is sufficient in itself. But together they open up perspectives for us.

There are too many things that point to Him. Life in all its aspects is too beautiful. Too beautiful for what? Too beautiful to be described with ordinary, impersonal words. The dashes for me are like roadsigns. They indicate that we are to go farther. Perhaps the word 'God' is itself a road-sign: it invites us not to be too niggardly in our thinking about the mystery of all things. Not matter, not the World-soul, not Fate, not Evolution or Chance. Those words are all too small to denote the great Hidden Mystery. The word 'God' functions as an 'integrator': it embraces all the possible aspects that arise in our experience and then points beyond those experiences to the Transcendent which mightily surpasses all we can imagine. Another example of an 'integrator' is the well-known word 'I'. 'I' am the one who is sitting here writing, or who is reading this book; 'I' am the one who can see the other (because the 'I' inhabits the outwardness of my body). 'I' am the one who wonders whether all in all life is worthwhile.

'I' am the one who can save his life only by giving it away to the One who is greater than myself, more I than i. Religious language therefore integrates all the traces of ultimacy which turn up in our experience of the finite. You can see 'God' as the elusive term used by human beings to refer to the Mystery that is experienced as present and operative in this not yet completed world. God has something to do with the 'and yet' of hope. You can describe God as the objective ground in Reality itself for the confidence we can have in the meaningfulness of life despite everything, in the deep significance of the ethical demand that engages us, ultimately in everything that makes our life worth living.

'God!', a personal word

Doubtless this philosophical language does not spring spontaneously to the lips of most people. Therefore I have still to say something about the exclamation-mark in the title: God !It is (also) a cry from the heart, a claim, a sign of self-surrender. It has an existential meaning. 'Life is a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved.' This quotation from a poster was already mentioned above. The tracks to God are therefore different for each person, and each one has to go to God completely in his or her own way. But not alone. Therefore it is so important to speak with others of our experiences of God. It is important also to listen to those who know God, the saints. Because we do have the spark of God's life in us, the life-story of each person is a road-sign to God, and well worth listening to. Each one experiences God in his or her own irreplaceable unique way, precisely as each of us uses the word 'I'.

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(ഭീപനാളം പബ്ലിക്കേഷൻസ്, പാലാ
1978, പേജ് VII - 144, വില ക. 6. 00)

“രോഗം നിണ്ണയിച്ചുകഴിഞ്ഞാൽ പിന്നീട് ചികിത്സ എളുപ്പമായി” എന്ന ആപ്തവാക്യം, സമുദായഗാത്രത്തെ സംബന്ധിച്ച അന്വർത്ഥമാണ്. ഒരു സമുദായഗാത്രത്തിന്റെ അനാരോഗ്യപ്രവണതകളും പഴക്കത്തുകളും യഥാസമയം കണ്ടുപിടിച്ച് പരിഹാരം തേടിയാൽ മാത്രമേ ആ സമുദായം സംപൂഷ്ടമാകൂ.

കേരള കത്തോലിക്കാസഭയ്ക്ക് ആഗോളകത്തോലിക്കാസഭയിൽ അതുല്യമായ ഒരു സ്ഥാനമുണ്ട്. എന്നിട്ടും നമ്മുടെ സഭയുടെ ആധുനിക സ്ഥിതിഗതികളെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള ശാസ്ത്രീയപഠനങ്ങൾ ഒന്നുംതന്നെ കാര്യമായി നടന്നിട്ടില്ല. കേരള കത്തോലിക്കാസഭയുടെ ഇന്നത്തെ സ്ഥിതിവിശേഷമെന്ത്? കത്തോലിക്കരുടെ ചിന്താഗതികളും അഭിപ്രായങ്ങളും എന്ത്? ഇതിനെപ്പറ്റിയുള്ള “ഒരു മനോഭാവ സർവ്വേ” (Attitude survey) യാണു് ഈ പുസ്തകത്തിലെ ഉള്ളടക്കം. സർവ്വേയ്ക്കു ലഭിച്ച ഉത്തരങ്ങൾ 12 ഭാഗങ്ങളായി വിഭജിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു. ദൈവവിശ്വാസം, ക്രിസ്തുസഭ, സഭാധികാരികൾ, അൽമായർ, കുടുംബജീവിതവും അസ്തിത്വജീവിതവും, ലൈംഗിക വിദ്യാഭ്യാസം, സമൂഹസേവനം, വിദ്യാഭ്യാസം, യുവജനപ്രശ്നങ്ങൾ, സമ്പദ്‌മോഡ്യമങ്ങൾ, റീത്തുകൾ, ലിററർജി തുടങ്ങിയവ.

കേരള കത്തോലിക്കാസഭയെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള ആധികാരികവും, ശാസ്ത്രീയവും ദൈവശാസ്ത്രപരവുമായ ഒരു ഗവേഷണഗ്രന്ഥമാണിതെന്നതിനു തക്ക മില്ല.